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IDOLS AND IDEALS.





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IDOLS AND IDEALS

WITH

AN ESSAY ON CHRISTIANITY.

BY

MONCURE DANIEL CONWAY, M.A.,

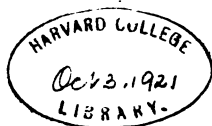
*Author of "The Sacred Anthology," "The
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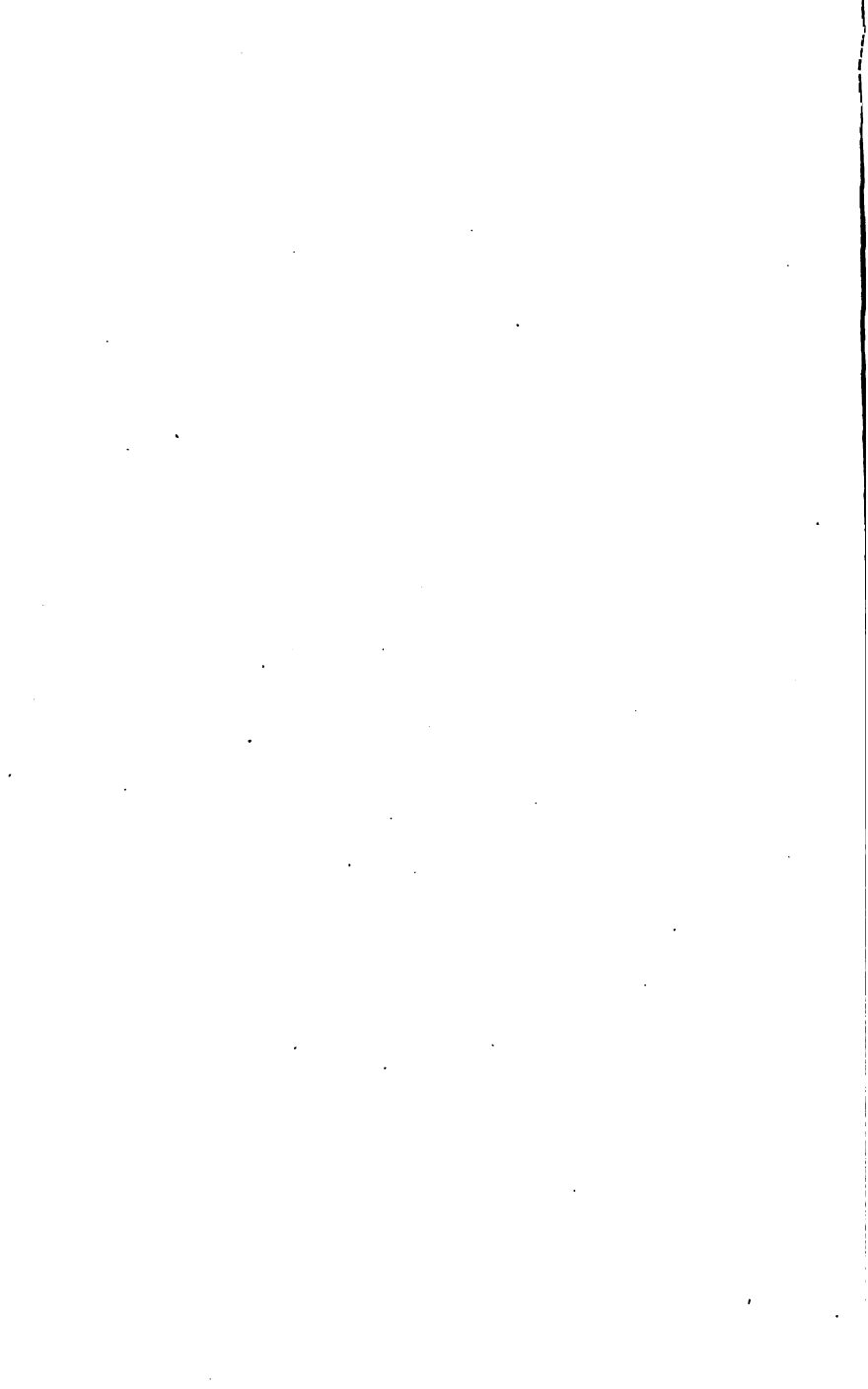
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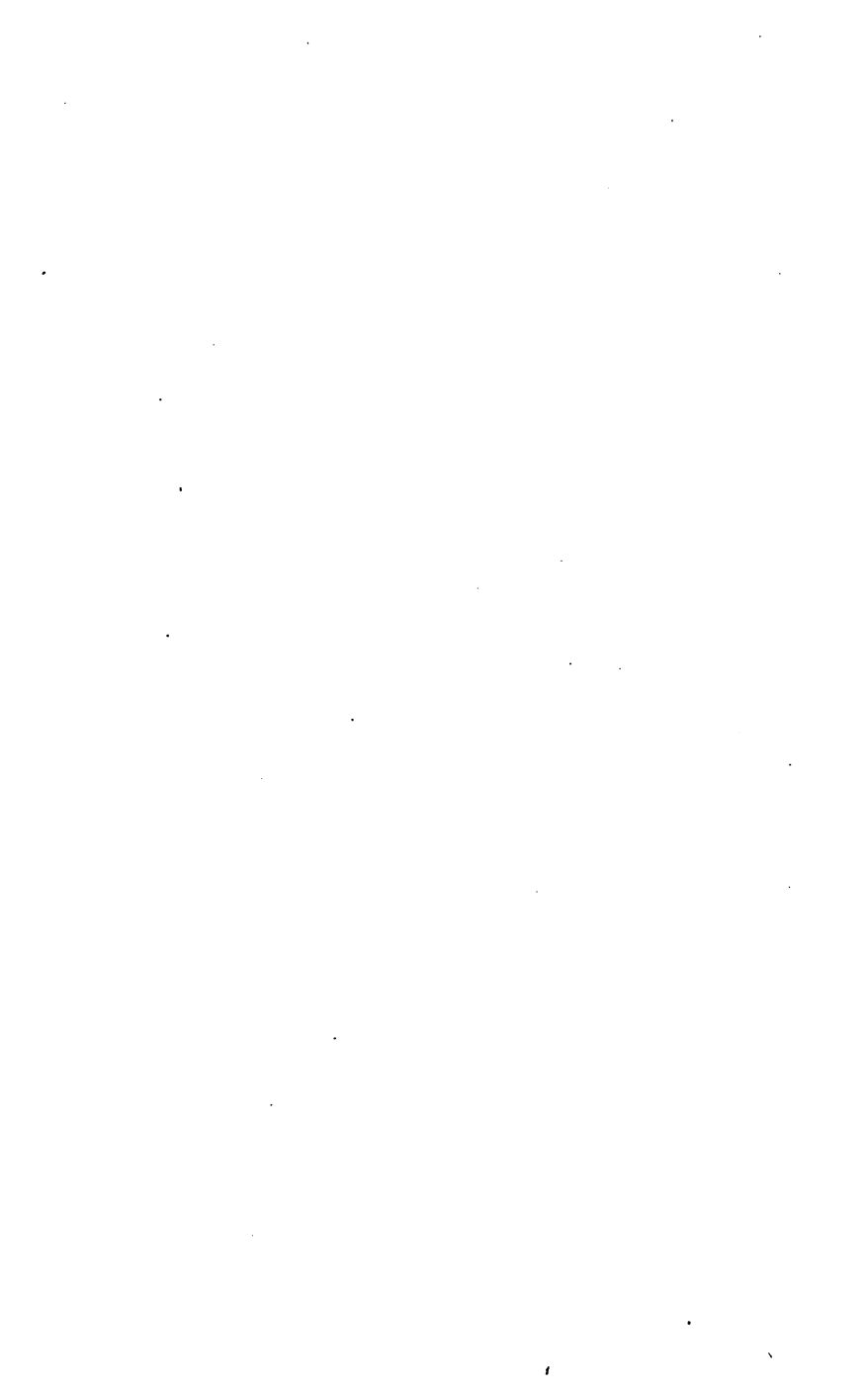
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I.

CONSEQUENCES.





CONSEQUENCES.

AN unhappy sign in any country is the appearance of pessimist speculations. Some English eyes appear to be troubled with the vision of a black star hovering over their country, threatening the wealth, greatness, and even the stability of the nation. There are apprehensions that the coal will give out, and with it all the manufacturing and railway enterprises which make the commercial supremacy of England ; next, that the intelligence of the country is alienated from its religion, which renders it certain that the masses of the people will presently be also alienated from it ; and since these will be without the restraints of culture, the downfall of creeds will involve the downfall of the social and political institutions which have grown up along with the creeds. It will require, say our sad soothsayers, a culture and refinement which the masses do not possess, to detach the social organism from the dogmatic parasites which have grown around it ; and when the scepticism of the educated has filtered down into them, they will make a rude, indiscriminate sweep of good and evil alike. Then “enter” Macaulay’s New Zealander with sketch-book, seeking picturesque ruins !

It is not within the scope of this essay to consider the particular perils pointed out by our prophets of evil. I merely refer to their warnings as illustrative of apprehensions felt by many in another direction, namely, the effect of religious inquiry on human happiness and character. And I do so because such apprehensions appear to me to rest upon fallacies quite similar to those fears of the results of free inquiry which I propose to consider. The main fallacy is the fear that the same intelligence which has adapted man to his present condition is to remain standing still while everything else changes. Our coal mines, it may be, are gradually to diminish, possibly to fail; but will that intellect which has invented steam engines, and other machinery, lose its power of invention, and for the first time show itself inadequate to meet emergencies as they arise? Is the future to have all our problems, and to be without brains of its own? So also in the case of the violent revolution apprehended, when the masses share the scepticism of the educated. Our wode ravens forget, apparently, that such a change as that cannot be an isolated one. Is it an enthusiasm to believe that in the same length of time a thousand other changes will also occur; that, for instance, the masses must acquire some of the calmness and self-control of the cultivated along with their scepticism; and also that the social fabric will improve, that the state will become nobler, and all classes possess too much interest in both to handle rashly any real and healthy institution?

This whole method of apprehension is treacherous. When Jesus said, "Sufficient unto the day is the evil

thereof ; to-morrow will take care of to-morrow's affairs," —he uttered a thought pregnant with philosophy as with faith. The plan of prognosticating practical evil has now become a favourite method of trying to intimidate free thought and free speech. This plan has been carried to its extreme by the present Bishop of Peterborough, who said that he would not stop to inquire whether the tidings of science were true or not ; he only asked whether they were glad tidings. Not finding them glad tidings—and they certainly are not promising for bishops—his lordship unhesitatingly rejects them, irrespective of their truth or untruth. The Bishop only caricatures a way of dealing with new truth which is being more plausibly used by many others than by this prelate, who has so well merited the thanks of scientific men by his naïve utterance.

Most of us, whose memories run back towards the beginning of this generation, must recognise a marked change in the tone of orthodoxy concerning rationalism. In place of the old intolerance, we now find a tone of apology, and meet with numbers of people who are eager to persuade us that they are not so orthodox as they seem. Again, we are as often appealed to to exercise charity as, in earlier times, we have had to appeal for it ourselves. It is to be hoped we shall all cultivate that virtue, but heretics cannot shut their eyes to the novelty of the situation. When cremation was lately proposed, and was bitterly denounced by the Catholic clergy in Belgium, a paper in that country remarked that it was a pity the Church which so opposed burning the bodies of the dead had not always

manifested an equal repugnance to burn the bodies of the living ; similarly, it is an instance of the irony of history that successors of the religionists who so long ruled England by reign of terror should now appeal for charity. Even Protestantism, when it followed Romanism in power, did not break its terrible weapons ; it used them until they become dull. Reduced at last to battle in an Age of Reason, and to answer argument with argument instead of with prisons and persecutions, it calls for the toleration it so long denied. Very well, let us have it,—charity for all ! We may doubt whether we should have heard so much about it had Superstition continued as strong as of old,—but still the high rule of reason is to speak the truth in love.

At the same time, long experience should make us prudent. The more valuable a coin the more dangerous is its counterfeit, and the more attractive a virtue the more necessary that its garb shall not be conceded to its opposite. Charity is due to every sincere man, but not to proven error. If a man be in error, the more I love him the more will I hate the falsity that misleads him. When the wolf pleaded for compassion, the shepherd replied, “Mercy to you were cruelty to the lamb.” It is difficult to see how it can be consistent with love to our fellow-beings that we should be tender to the errors that afflict them, or to the superstition that devours them. Clemency becomes cruelty when it parts from common sense.

All this is too plain to require argument. But of late its force has been escaped by another plea. We are

now told that in the progress of the world the old beliefs have lost their darker features. The old talons of persecution have been pared away; fanaticism has become unfashionable; hell has been spiritualised; and creeds that once roused agony, fear, and consequent intolerance are now softened into unrealised words or mystical meanings. Superstitions may remain, but they are now pretty superstitions, like a child's belief in fairies. And we are asked, Is it not unnecessary, nay cruel, to take away such sweet illusions, when they are so harmless? A gentleman who takes his family to church regularly, said to me, "I know as well as any one that the clergyman preaches fables, but I do not care to worry my children by telling them so. When I take them to the pantomime, I don't tell them, All that scenery is only daubed pasteboard, the fairy there is merely a painted woman, and her jewels only glass, bought for a penny. Whether at church or theatre I prefer to humour their pleasant illusions, and let them remain happy in them as long as they can." It appeared to me strange that this gentleman should not see the great difference between transient illusion and permanent delusion. He humours the illusions of the pantomime, because he knows very well that his child will outgrow them. It would distress him very much if he thought that, when his child grew to be twenty years of age, it would still believe in the reality of fairies. But, in encouraging the pulpit fables, he is fostering things that, from being the illusions of childhood, harden into the delusions of the whole life.

Mr. Tennyson has put this common notion into rhyme,

and his verses are the favourite quotation of the school we are considering. They were recently offered by the *Athenæum* as a rebuke to Mr. Morley for his excellent work "On Compromise," and again by a plausible writer in censure of the plain-speaking of certain pulpits. The verses run thus :

" O thou that after toil and storm
May'st seem to have reach'd a purer air,
Whose faith has centre everywhere,
Nor cares to fix itself to form.

" Leave thou thy sister, when she prays,
Her early heaven, her happy views,
Nor thou with shadow'd hint confuse
A life that leads melodious days."

These verses are nearly the only ones which the poet and his friends might wish obliterated from his fair pages, as representing (one must believe) his first timorous and unsteady step on a path which we may hope has since led to heights that shame their faithless fears. Passing their undertone of contempt for the female intellect, of which the poet was probably unconscious, let us consider what our duty is to that praying sister, or brother either, whose illusions we are called upon to spare. If our sister is praying in earnest, if doubt has not crept into her heart—we must not call it her intellect, I suppose—then her faith does not merely include

" Her early heaven, her happy views,"

but also her early hell, and some most unhappy views. If her prayer be not a mere attitude, she is probably imploring an angry God not to send her children,

brothers, or friends into everlasting anguish and despair. If that be her creed, she can hardly be leading such melodious days that it should be cruel to hint that her apprehensions may be unfounded.

But the poet might remind us that he asks us to leave her the pleasing side of her creed only—to remove her fears, but humour her hopes though they be false. Our sister must be feeble indeed if this be possible; her powers must be very weak if she does not perceive that her Bible and her Prayer-Book tell her as much of God's wrath as of his love, correlate hell and heaven, and that, from such source, she has no better authority for her hopes than for her fears. But granting that the process be possible, and that we find her living in an atmosphere of rosy delusions, the question arises, ought we to avoid disturbing them? Do not let us confuse that question with any other. It is not whether we should obtrude our opinions on others, but whether we should sanction their opinions when we believe them false; it is not whether we should be rude, but whether we should be sincere. One who loves truth will not need exhortation to try and make it attractive instead of repulsive. The danger is the other way, that truth will be so smooth and polite as not to be recognised for what it really is. The real question is whether truth should be concealed and suppressed out of consideration for any one's pleasant prejudices.

It is perfectly easy to show on general principles that such tampering with truth is disloyal and more dangerous than honest error itself. It is easy to show that to sup-

press truth is to suggest falsehood ; that it is to foster a malarious atmosphere which brings forth not only pretty superstitions but ugly ones, and leaves the mind to be overgrown not only with gay weeds but rank poisons ; that where a pleasant fiction finds shelter a dangerous error may nestle at its side ; and that if the great souls of history had smoothed over falsehood because it was agreeable, and remained silent before the pet prejudices of weak minds, we should all be worshipping to-day the painted fetish dolls of the world's infancy.

But I propose at present to look at the matter from another and somewhat lower point of view. This theory of suppression is not only immoral, but rests upon an essential delusion. That delusion is that truth is hard, cold, unlovely, and that all the beauty rests with the illusions. The prevalence of this notion is easily explained. It is the natural tendency of an existing dogmatic system, when it finds some of its points coming into collision with common sentiment, to smooth and explain them away, cover them with velvet, so as to make itself as attractive as possible ; and one of the oldest tricks of dogmatic art is to paint the opposing view in as dark colours as possible to make itself more pleasing by the contrast. The early Christians painted their own saints with beautiful tints on church windows, but the saints of other religions they painted as demons with terrible horns and flaming eyes ; and the descendants of those early Christians have not lost their art. We know their skill in theologic gargoyles,—the infidel on his death-bed surrounded by horrors, the materialist given up to

sensuality, the man of science living in an Arctic sea of negation, perishing without hope. It is no wonder that with these forbidding chimæras in the distance so many are frightened back from the search for truth, and beg that the realm of delusions may be spared.

But there is one suspicious circumstance about all these pictures of the results of beliefs so invested with horrors ; they are depicted by those who have never held those beliefs, who have no experience of their real bearings, and who must therefore have drawn upon their imagination for their facts. We do not hear the actual materialist complaining that his belief is hopeless, nor the real heretic crying out that he is in icy despair. They seem about as hearty and cheerful as other people. In one of our popular dramas, a rigidly righteous old lady is troubled because a certain blind youth is constantly cheerful ; regarding blindness as sent by an afflicting providence she shakes her head at the young man's happiness, and says that when tribulation is sent to us we ought to tribulate. This old lady, who, never having been blind, knew nothing of its resources, seems to have written a good deal of modern theology. I do not deny that there is a certain naturalness about her inferences concerning things she knows nothing about. When she appears in the guise of a popular preacher or a doctor of divinity, he sits down to consider what he would be and do if he (otherwise, of course, retaining his present views) were a materialist, or a sceptic, and how Paine and Voltaire must have died—if they died logically. But having never tried it, he is compelled to evolve each result out of his

inner consciousness. The image so evolved must sooner or later be brought face to face with the fact, and the contrast between the two is sometimes astonishing. Let us review a few examples.

In former times, theologians could not imagine that any man could have an actual and conscientious disbelief of their dogmas. They attributed all scepticism to an evil heart, or to a desire to forget and hide the truth lest it might check their evil propensities. This being their premiss, it was but a natural inference that all sceptics must be wicked men. Thus Thomas Paine was branded as a drunkard—a pure fabrication—and Voltaire stigmatised for immoralities of which he was innocent. But there was another inference. These men being only pretended unbelievers, it was but natural that when the hour of death arrived, the disguise should fall, the truth come out, and the terrors it was impossible really to disbelieve then come so close that they would cry for mercy and die in the agonies of remorse. To suit that theory fictitious scenes were invented for the deathbed of Paine, who died most peacefully, and that of Voltaire, whose only trouble in his closing hours was that the priests hung about him like vultures.

But that old theory broke down. The upright lives of such men as Hume, and Herbert of Cherbury, and Bolingbroke, and their peaceful deaths, reduced it to absurdity. There has succeeded to it another—that unless a man believe in immortality, his life must be selfish, and he must have an excessive horror of death ; while, on the other hand, the believer in heaven sacrifices

present for future happiness, and dies with joyful hope. But this theory breaks down under the facts just like the other. The sceptical philosophers around us are apparently no more selfish than other people. If they were devoted to self, they would take care first of all not to express their scepticism. There are eminent men of science around us, unbelievers in Animism, whose abilities might have made them bishops, but whose self-sacrificing devotion to what they believe true, causes them to live in poverty, and under the denunciation of the comfortable souls who find godliness to be great gain. Nor do we find that heretics have any greater dread of death than believers in a future life. The orthodox man for whom the grave is a gate to Paradise, sends for the doctor just as fast as the sceptic, and never seems in any hurry to enjoy his future bliss. On the other hand, no martyrs have ever marched more fearlessly to death than the revolutionists of France and Germany, who, in nine cases out of ten, were unbelievers in any future life. The unbeliever in a future life has not, indeed, much reason for the gloom commonly ascribed to him. If he has lost expectation of future joys, he has equally lost all apprehension of future woes ; and, so far as the natural desire for continued existence is concerned, he knows that, if it is to be, he will attain it just as much as any believer in it with the advantage that it will not have for a part of it the torture of some of his friends.

Let us take another case,—the common idea of what it is to be a fatalist or necessitarian. The believer in Free-will sits down and evolves from his inner consciousness,

the typical believer in Necessity. As the fatalist believes that what will be will be ; that nothing can be altered by the will of man ; so, he must assuredly be a man who sits passive and allows things to take their own course. But when our speculative believer in Free-will comes to examine the facts, he finds that the most active figures in history have been those same believers in fate. They are such men as the heroes of Greece ; as Paul and Mahomet ; Luther, Calvin, and John Knox ; as Cromwell and his soldiers ; as the Puritans who founded the American Commonwealth ; men, aggressive, powerful, irresistible, who have left their impress on the world in epochs ; men, too, who, instead of finding in their election to divine favour, a reason for self-indulgence, felt in it an inspiration to surrender their every power to what they conceived to be the will of God.

As a final example, we have before us the ordinary conception of a materialist. Very few people are competent to pursue those philosophical studies which underlie the various conclusions called nominalism, realism, intuitionism, utilitarianism, idealism, materialism. But the latter word has a familiar sound : materialism is related to matter, and matter plainly means the earth, and flesh and blood, food and drink ; consequently a materialist must mean a gross, 'fleshy' character, a man who believes in nothing he cannot bite, and, as opposed to the idealist, he must be a man without ideas. This popular notion of a materialist recalls the sad fate of one of our artists, who made a sea-side picture, and among the common objects of the sea-side which he

painted on the sands was a blood-red lobster. He had never seen a lobster, except as boiled for the table, and he supposed it had the same colour when washed up from the sea. He painted in accordance with his experience; and his surprising work so added to his experience, that he is now, I believe, a respectable merchant. And so the average orthodox man bestows on the materialist his own experience of matter, and boils him in the hot water of his catechetic consciousness very red. But when we come to consider the materialists as they are, we find them quite the reverse. It would be difficult—I might almost say impossible—to find in the long list of eminent materialists a single gross or sensual character. English materialists have been known to us as men especially consecrated to ideas. They have been such men as Shelley, in whose poems of Nature Robert Browning found a high correspondence with the divine; or Robert Owen, and his fellow socialists, giving up life and fortune in the pursuit of an ideal society; and such men are fairly followed to-day by the men of science, and the positivists, and the secularists—men of plain living and high thinking, almost ascetic in their self-denial, and ever dreaming of higher education, of co-operation, and of other schemes for the moral, intellectual, or social advancement of mankind. Such are the men for whom Christian prelates in their palaces sigh, deploring amid their luxury, the gross materialism of the times!

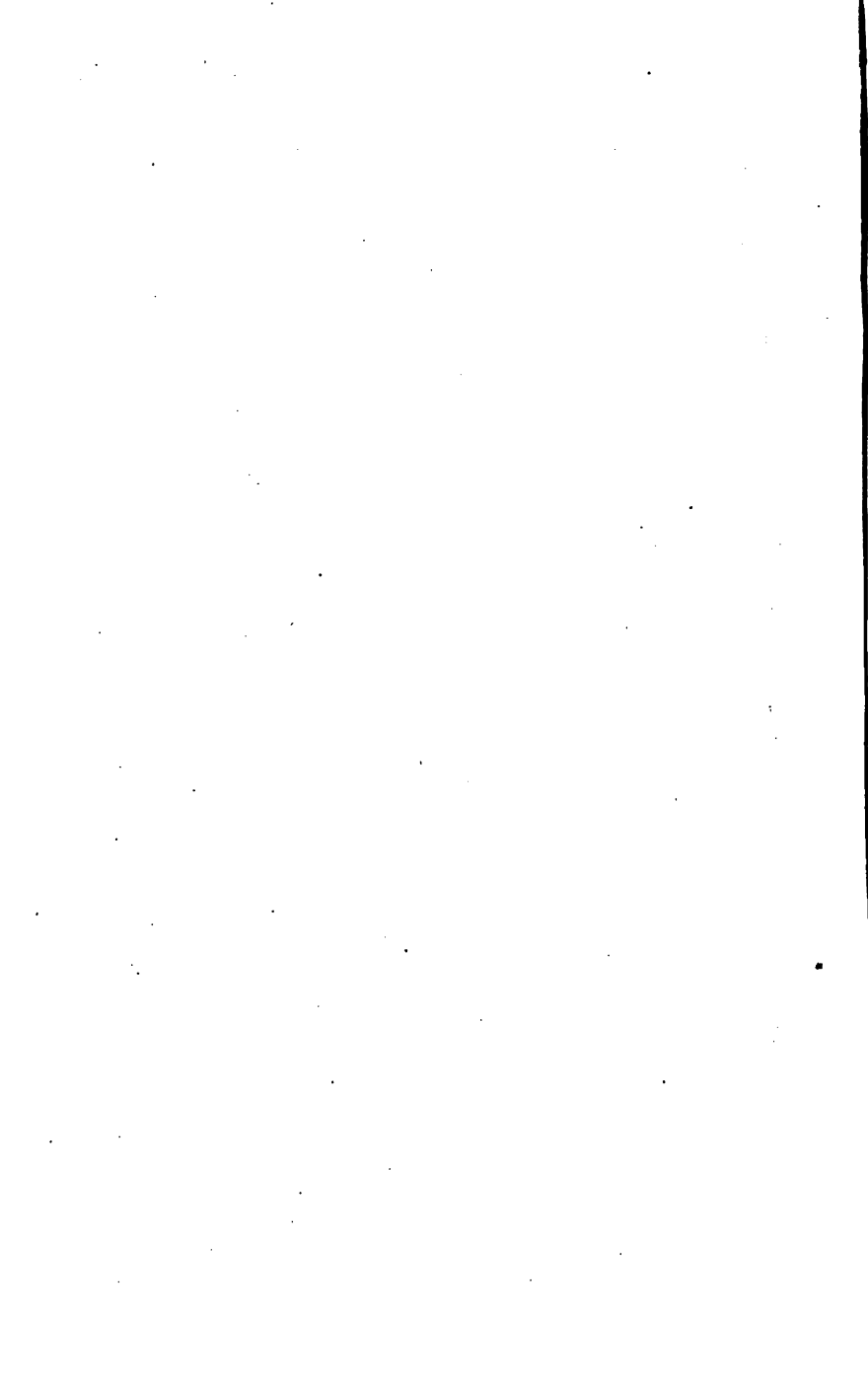
Now, let me not be misunderstood. The fact that believers in these several doctrines have contradicted by their lives and characters the *à priori* theories formed

about them, does not prove their doctrines true. The fact that Thomas Paine, when the Americans offered him money for his writings, refused to take it, poor as he was, but devoted it to the cause of liberty, refutes the idea that an infidel must be selfish ; but it does not prove Paine's belief to be true. Nor does the life of Paul prove the truth of predestination, nor that of Shelley the truth of materialism. As little do such facts show that there is no connection between intellectual convictions and practical life. What such facts do show, is just this : that the implied method of dealing with questions is treacherous. Truth is not to be tested by anyone's speculative apprehensions as to its results. It is as if a painter should sit down at the base of a hill he has never ascended, to sketch the landscape which he supposes to be seen from its summit. The height may command outlooks he cannot imagine until he has climbed it. If the orthodox believer really occupied the point of view reached by the thinker seen only from his own, he might find him surrounded by prospects, forces, influences, which alter the case materially. Every liberal thinker's experience must confirm this. The free-thinker knows well that it is the sign of an embryonic phase of inquiry, to dread its consequences upon the character or happiness of any man, woman, or child. It has not brought gloom to himself, nor demoralization ; he does not find his life a discord in contrast with any " melodious days " when he believed in a jealous God and a yawning hell ; he knows that truthfulness is the sustaining thing, and the ardent pursuit of truth able to fill heart and brain with enthusiasm and

hope. Why should he imagine that what has brought to himself liberation and light should bring a shadow on the life of his "praying sister," whom he can only regard as a victim on whom Superstition, like a ghoul, is preying?

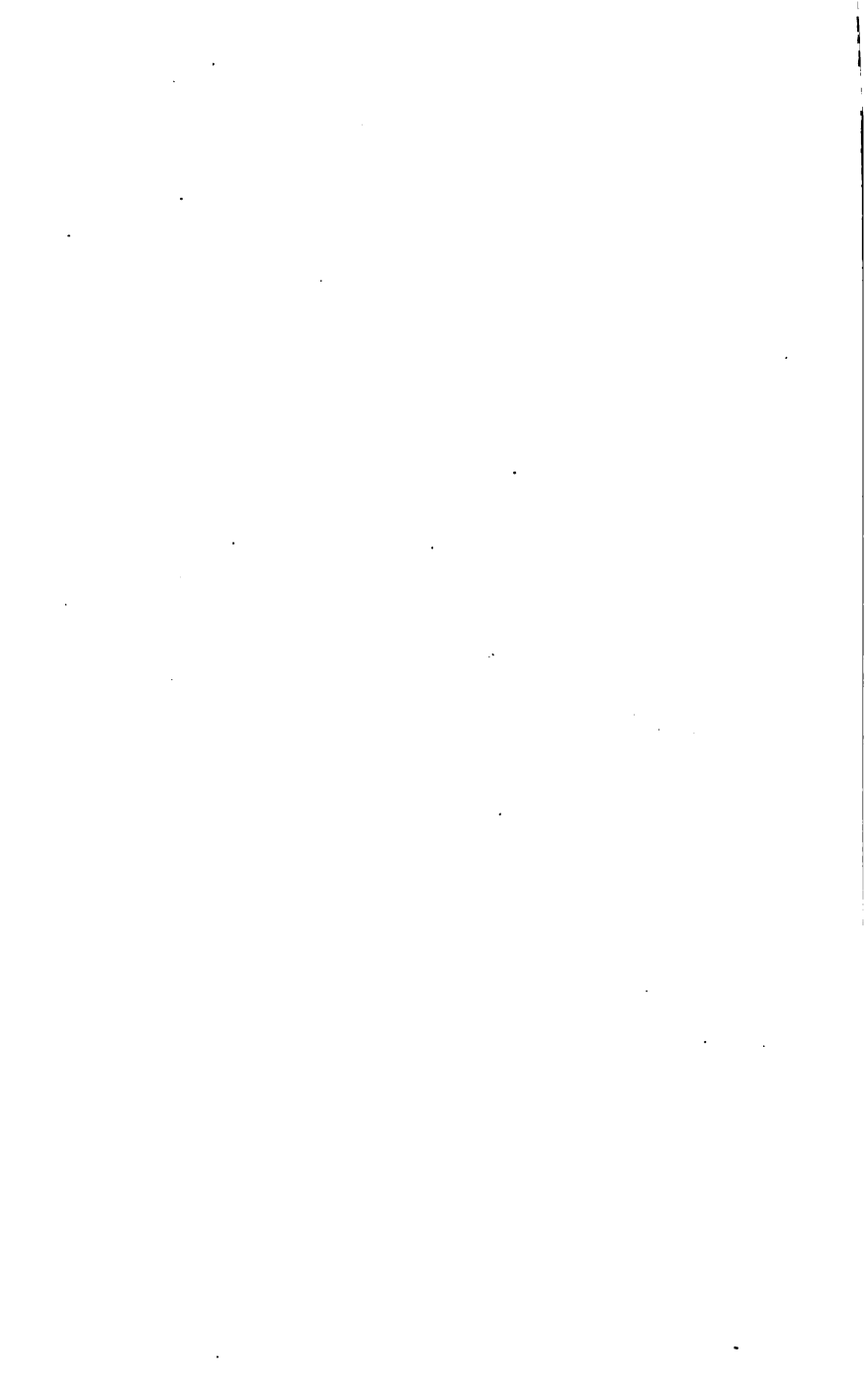
The free inquirer will discover full soon that the only "saving faith" is a perfect trust in truth, and that the only real infidelity is the belief that a lie can do better work than truth. He will take to heart Montaigne's advice, and fear only Fear. No alarms about the consequences of the diffusion of truth can shake his nerves or cause the balance to tremble in his hand. Truth has ever justified herself. She can look back to fair results, to the noblest triumphs, and in their light see the chains that bind all the lions on her path. We pursue our inquiries, not without experience, not in the infancy of the world, but amid the mighty shades of heroic forerunners; amid a cloud of brave witnesses, who knew that the children of Truth have nothing to fear, living or dying; whose fidelities have built up the temples of Science and Civilization amid the clamours of cowards; and they all cry shame on the fears that would betray our reason and sap our strength; they cry Onward! to the heart that abandons the flesh-pots of falsehood, even for a wilderness where leads the pillar of truth—be it fire, be it cloud.





II

GROWING SUPERSTITIONS





GROWING SUPERSTITIONS.

I.

NO age is conscious of its own superstitions. It would no doubt have surprised Socrates very much if he could have foreseen that his last words, "We owe a cock to Æsculapius," would one day be regarded as a striking instance of how superstition clings to the very martyrs of reason. With what unsuspecting confidence does Christ speak of the devil and his angels, at the very moment when he is proclaiming a deity whose love goes out to all, like the sunshine falling alike on good and evil. Such survivals of popular delusion in the greatest minds of the past, along with great principles of truth, may well turn our eyes searchingly on ourselves. It is true, that so far as the detection of hereditary and common errors are concerned, we have great advantages over even the foremost men of the far past. We have developed the comparative method, and the means of applying it to our beliefs. It would have been impossible for Socrates or Christ to trace the opinions around them, hunt them back to their origin in some Indian metaphor or Assyrian fable. Nor did they

have a long and carefully-kept record of many ages, the converging experiences of many races, which surround the man of to-day with mirrors in which he can see his own age reflected. They had but little chance of studying history,—philosophy teaching by example. We should fall far beneath our opportunities if we did not detect the familiar fallacies around us to a larger extent than was possible to the past, now that we are brought face to face with them as they existed in the past, and can know the results of them as worked out by intervening generations.

It appears to be the one opinion held in common by men of all shades of opinion that the old order of Christendom is going to pieces. It is confessed in the rage of protestant fanatics against the spread of unbelief, and equally in the outcries of catholics as they see their strongest organisations suppressed, and their Pope abandoned by nations he once controlled. Amid the confusion brought on by this state of things, the most hopeful sign is the degree to which leaders of opinion are studying those eras of history which correspond to this era. Remarkable studies of this kind have appeared which merit the closest attention. The new work entitled "Supernatural Religion," contributes a large amount of knowledge concerning Christian Mythology. We there may see how on the breaking up of the old Hebrew religion, and also the Greek and Egyptian religions, their fables were saved from the deluge on the Christian ark to populate the world again with superstitions. Valuable too is Dr. Draper's "History of the Conflict between

Science and Religion," published in the excellent International series. Sir Henry Maine's histories of our institutions are invaluable books, showing by what forces and laws the civilisation around us was built, and enabling us to detect the same in the evolution which takes the form of apparent disintegration. Such works as Michelet's "*La Sorcellerie*," Mr. Tylor's "*Primitive Culture*," Sir John Lubbock's "*Primitive Man*," De Gubernatis' "*Zoological Mythology*," Mr. Ralston's works on the Folklore of Russia—and all books on Folklore—lay bare the roots of a thousand superstitions which, in their polished if not their rude form, we encounter every day. Not the least important service is that which is done us by the more scholarly of the magazines. In the month of May (1875) two articles appeared which bring to a careful reader a more intimate knowledge of the realities of Greek religion than any University could teach him in a year. One of these is a paper on "*Hesiod*," in the "*Fortnightly Review*," and the other is in "*Fraser's Magazine*," entitled "*Sea Studies*."

The latter is especially important, notwithstanding some very questionable inferences. The fine scholar who wrote it, Mr. Froude, devoted the main time of a long voyage to reading the plays of Euripides, and gives us a profound analysis of the "*Bacchae*." It is certain that in the works of that poet are embodied the most real and salient features of Greek life and thought during the third and fourth centuries before Christ. Poets and philosophers there were in that period whose works bring us their individual feeling and thought ; but the dramatic

writer embodies the sense of the people, and aims to place on the stage before them that which shall show the very age and body of their own time, its form and pressure. Euripides was born about 2,350 years ago, and it is the Greece of that epoch which speaks to us from his page. Our current impression of Greece, as it existed in those centuries, is derived from the splendid literature which the revival of classical learning gave us. We know Greece by its poetry, its philosophy, and their gods and goddesses appear to us shining in purple and gold as the poets idealised them. Time and distance have destroyed what was trivial. We see the noble forms of Plato and Socrates in the Academy, but hear not the noise of the brutal mob dragging one of them to death and the other into slavery. But the terrible disenchanting voice of Euripides comes to tell us that in his time all those gods and goddesses were to the people demons and hags. Apollo, Minerva, Venus, Juno,—they were all devils, thirsting for blood, demanding human victims, entrapping human beings in horrible crimes for the mere pleasure of vengeance on mortals for guilt which they (the gods) wished to monopolise.

II.

Bacchus first appears in Mythology as a beneficent being, who taught mankind the culture of fruits, and the vine only among others, taught them laws, arts, religion. In the time of Euripides—the great intellectual age of

Greece—he appears as a fearful power, inspired only by intoxication, raging through the world, claiming supreme worship, and inflicting dire evils on everybody who refused him homage. He comes to Thebes, and when the people refuse to believe on him, he strikes all the women mad, and transforms them, as it were, to beasts.

Pentheus, the king who ventures to doubt whether the god of these mad women is a real god, is told by a priest that even if Bacchus is not a god, it might be as well to call him so by a pious fraud, as the masses are all rushing after him ; but Pentheus will do nothing of the kind. He sends Bacchus to prison : of course the god laughs him to scorn. Pentheus is led through the streets amid universal scorn, the thyrsus of Bacchus waving over his head. Then came the grand finale of the play. The sceptical king is carried into a forest, where his own mother and her female attendants, maddened by Bacchus, take him for a beast, tear him limb from limb, and the drama ends with the grand tableau of the mother coming to her senses, holding in her lap the head of her son slain by herself, while above is the god smiling at the triumphant proof he has given of his power and divinity.

Such was the divine drama of blood, which the populace of Athens crowded to witness in their Opera House. Now, go to the Opera House in London, and you shall see crowds gathered still, to listen to Mr. Moody preaching the divine drama of blood. You shall find thousands still listening to the story of a God of terror and vengeance, exacting blood to appease him, and ready

to strike dead even English scoffers who doubt the modern manifestation of his power.

The connection between the two is not imaginary ; it is strictly historical. The twelve plays of Euripides disclose, first, that the ancient Greek religion had entirely passed out of the belief of intelligent people. It was the age of great men—Plato, Socrates, Aristophanes, Æschylus, Sophocles ; and amid them the popular religion lay—a corpse. But how does a religion die ? Simply by the brains going out of it. When cultivated people either abjure it, or if, for the sake of popularity, they give it lip service, cease to guide their action by it ; when sensible men pay no heed to its terrors or its promises ; that is one symptom of death. Another is that so often portrayed by Euripides,—madness. Nervous women especially, made insane by clinging to the old dogmas, with their terrible threats, divine wrath, instant danger, infernal torment. And, finally, the most formidable sign of death, the religion falls completely into the hands of the gross, the ignorant, the base. That is the setting in of decay.

But it is one thing for a thing to decay, another for it to be buried. The terrible truth is that when a religion decays every particle of it has a chance of becoming the seed of a new life,—a life that may be good, but also may be evil. Now let us turn to our Greek mirror again, and observe what took place when the old religion perished, because culture ebbed out of it. Each bit of it became the centre of a party of vulgar, deluded people, who raised it into new power. But among the displaced

elements one was found to have the chief element of popularity in it—that which was not native in the religion, but had come there from the Semitic race. This idea was that every god demands the sacrifice of that which is most dear to mortals, that which is without blemish, most pure and beautiful: in early times it had been thought sufficient to appease God if first fruits were offered, but Cain fell into disgrace because Abel offered something more costly: then it might seem as if the lamb or the dove might answer; but, as these did not seem to change the course of Nature, there was a suggestion that human victims were necessary. This idea was unknown to the early Greeks as to their Aryan ancestors. It had been caught from Jewish sources. Jephtha's daughter reappears, even to her name, as the Greek Iphigenia, who was nearly sacrificed because of her youth and beauty, but saved as Isaac was in the Semitic story. But this idea, which had barely tinged the old religion of Greece, on its decay became the leading thing. Six of the plays of Euripides were written to present to the people this new idea in all its tragical varieties. The once beautiful gods now appear devastating countries, and only becoming pacified when a virgin or beautiful youth is sacrificed. When the heroic Macaria is sacrificed her highest consolation is that she is passing to eternal sleep, annihilation: to dwell with such gods as demanded her sacrifice offered no attractions. "O that there may be nothing!" she cries; "to die is of all ills the surest remedy." On the other hand this horrible idea which Judea had sent to Greece had died out of Judea

itself. Only animals had for ages been there sacrificed. Christ was innocent of any such idea as remission through a human victim. But when his name was carried to Greece as founder of a new religion, it was found that this idea of human sacrifice had grown to enormous proportions. And when, some centuries after Christ, priests manufactured a religion and called it Christianity, the main parts of the machinery were a vindictive God, a fearful hell, and the offering up of a pure and perfect being as the only means of pacifying the deity and escaping hell.

The theory of atonement by human sacrifice thus gained a new lease of life in Christianity. Fortunately, in one sense, it was mystical and not practical—at least not literal—in its application ; the blood of Christ was declared efficacious without further slaughter of human victims. Nevertheless the principle and spirit were there, and had to work themselves out in Christian history. They became logically embodied in the superstition that the natural powers of man were to be sacrificed—his reason, love, affection, to be offered up by vows of celibacy, renunciation of all joys. God was best pleased when men and women became mendicants, hermits, monks and nuns. People were taught that they could win a smile to the stern countenance of the deity by rolling themselves in thorns or by tortures of flagellation. The Catholic Church gradually outgrew that idea, when it had drawn within itself the learning and excellence of Europe ; it became, on the other hand, the church of festivities, of the arts, and even of indulgences. Friar

Lombes preached "God is joy. You destroy the divine image in your soul by sadness." St. Gregory reckoned "sorrow" among the seven capital sins. St. Francis d'Assisi brought roses to plant in place of the thorns with which St. Benedict had torn himself seven centuries before. But the old sacrificial idea was still strong in the sombre North Germany, and England still held to the ascetic view. God was appeased by the sacrifice of the most perfect virginal being in the universe, but no one could enjoy the vicarious benefit without an individual sacrifice of carnal reason and all worldly pleasures. That was the doctrine of the Reformation, which was a sword of two edges ; while one cut through sacerdotal chains, the other mutilated the fair proportions of human life. And it is thus that the human sacrifices of Israel, of Assyria, of Egypt, of Greece, are traceable through history till they appear in Mr. Moody's sermon on "The Blood."

III.

Looking into the period of Greece when its galaxy of great men stood aloof from the popular religion, and gave it over to the Athenian Moodys and Sankeys to make it completely into their own image, we see point for point the features of our own time. The deities of Greece were born as beautiful idealisations of sun, cloud, star ; under theology they hardened to self-willed omnipotent men and women devastating heaven and earth with their passions ; at last relegated to popular ignorance,

they were deformed to demons, and each that had been a poet's metaphor in the beginning, before it perished, cost its holocaust of human victims. How goes on the process with us? When Francis Galton of the Royal Society questions the chief scientific men as to their religion and finds ninety-nine in one hundred repudiating orthodoxy; when literature and art have become completely secularised, the age of Euripides has reappeared. The brains are out and the dogmatic body dies. And the worst symptoms of its decay begin to appear. The putrescent particles find a congenial soil in prevailing ignorance and sprout up with new vigour. The decay of superstition among the educated is answered by its growth among the vulgar. As the rites of Bacchus drove the Thebans mad, the doctrine of "The Blood" is increasing English insanity. This insanity is not only visible in the increase of lunatics in hospitals—seventy per cent. increase during the year 1874-5 in Scotland alone through the revival; but it is visible in the agonisings of ritualists before their altars, in pilgrimages to mediæval shrines, the canonisation of deluded nuns, "fasting girls" in Wales and Belgium, the appearance of the stigmata of Christ on morbid women. In a yet lower class it appears in the growth of fanaticism. We can hardly realise in a city so civilised as this, what is the reign of dogmatic terror in some other regions. Take Lancashire, for example. Lancashire, once famed for its witches, has preserved a mass of superstitions unsurpassed perhaps by any other English county. The swarming populations still believe in boggarts, bargeists and ghosts, and cower when they

hear a dog howl at night. All the commerce of Liverpool and Manchester have not availed to dispel these phantasms. When Mr. Moody was holding his meetings in Manchester, he found a popular feeling strong enough to support his wildest utterances. The crowds seemed to gloat on his horrors to an extent which encouraged him in strange extravagances. He had heard of a lady who had prevented her daughter from going to his inquiry meeting, and to a vast crowd in Free Trade Hall he depicted that lady and her daughter in hell undergoing punishments so foul and frightful—depicted this in such gross and vulgar language—that none but an audience paralysed by superstition would have tolerated it for a moment. Precisely such punishments were depicted on the Grecian stage as overtaking all who refused to join in with the wild rites of Bacchus. A lady who had gone from curiosity with her son, wrote a protest against such scandalous proceedings. But no paper would print her letter. The editors said that the popular feeling was such that they were compelled to refuse all communications either for or against the revivalists. These men preach no new doctrines. They simply quicken and restore the two or three worst dogmas—divine wrath, original sin, blood-atonement, which had been quietly abandoned by the intelligent. Even in the time of King James the notion of a personal devil had become so vulgar that the translators of our version had modified several utterances of Christ—one in the Lord's Prayer—which sanctioned belief in Satan. But all that is revived; the ministers of religion have generally aided in its revival; and the

popular success of the renewed terrors promise to lead to a growth of those superstitions whose term seemed to have been reached.

IV.

In another direction there has germinated out of the decay of the old faith a formidable growth of ghostly and ghastly marvels. When Romanism died in England, its remains sprang up in witchcraft: the decay of Christian supernaturalism has now scattered the seeds of ghostcraft.

There can be little doubt of the sincerity of the great mass of believers in the alleged spirit manifestations. There is no call for indignation towards them, nor contempt. They are usually persons of sensitive, or morbid, nervous organisation, who bear in their hearts the wounds which once were healed for such by priestly consolations no longer available. Emotional, warm-hearted, they are at the same time morally alienated from the discredited creeds around them, and have gone forth seeking rest and hitherto finding none. The support which culture, poetry, and art bring to exceptional minds amid the suspense of faith which has followed the exposure of sacerdotal imposture and traditional error, is not available for them, and they especially can not bear the doubts and misgivings with which, since the disappearance of animistic creeds, the future of their loved and lost is enveloped. They are to be respected also for the

veracity and simplicity with which they reject the theological casuistry, which declares to be absurd and impossible in the present age events precisely similar to those on which, as occurring in the past, the entire fabric of religious authority rests ! To this it may be added, to the credit of spiritualists, that, in the gentle and kindly characteristics of their belief, are reflected not only their own fine qualities, but not less the progress of the race. As compared with witchcraft we find instead of dark and deadly diabolisms and malicious spells, the belief in good angels; and the spirits of the dead, whose return was once believed to be fraught with danger, are now invoked as guardians of the living.

The many virtues and warm affections which characterise the sincere believers in spiritualism can not fail to increase our exasperation against those who try to turn such sacred feelings and qualities into a means of pecuniary gain. But even against the miserable vagrant mediums who play upon the morbid nerves of sorrowing women, and profess to call up their dead at so much per ghost, it would seem that an honest and thoughtful man can not spare too much of his indignation. For behind the unctuous impostor and his victim there stands in the shadow that fatal established hypocrisy which has prepared the way for the tragedy, and still steadily paralyses every arm that would prevent its recurrence.

It is not the Messrs. "Sludge" who have drilled into the people their belief in witches, sorceries, miracles; it is not they who have carefully taught every English child that it is infidelity to believe in the uniformity of

natural laws ; nor is it they who have enforced by ages of argument the credulity which meekly accepts the weakest testimony of ignorant people against the accumulated and demonstrated knowledge of the human race. This miserable work has been done not by mediums, but by theologians sent out among the people by great universities. It is they who put the Bible into the hands of every man, woman, and child ; declare it the word of God by Act of Parliament ; and then, when any one professes to call up Saul, declare that what is an infallible fact in Endor is a palpable imposture in London ! They now find that it is easier to prevent any standard of reason from being set up in simple minds than to give them the double tongue. The masses have accepted the principle of unreason so carefully drilled into them by Church and State ; they accept all the witchcraft and thaumaturgy of the " Word of God : " what they have not accepted is the sacerdotal art of affecting to believe what they really reject. The spiritualists boast that they number millions in England and America. Why not ? Every vulgar church and chapel has prepared the soil for the tares they sow. Every child is taught in its school that the air swarms with imps and angels. It is so written in the Bible, in the Catechism, in every body of divinity. The common people are not sophisticated enough to understand that all this is only to be taught and said, not to be really believed and acted upon. They take it to heart. The child who has been always taught that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John stand at its bed-posts, will not think it very wonderful if they

should occasionally signify their presence by raps. Why should not angels manifest themselves? Why should the dead re-appear only among Jews, and the far past monopolise miracles and the secrets of the grave?

V.

Wherever spiritualism goes in Christendom its basis in the Christian religion is revealed by the ease with which it is adapted to the prevailing notions of the populace. It is too much, perhaps, to anticipate that Christians generally will acknowledge the legitimacy of this newest offspring of their system; but honest Protestants may be enabled to realise the fact to some extent as it is indicated in connection with Catholicism.

As I write a man named Etienne Geoffre, a gardener, is imprisoned at Narbonne, in France, for having "exercised the art of healing without certificate, diploma, or letters of recommendation, by means of water lotions, spiritualistic practices, and the sale of spiritualistic books." A large crowd is said to have attended the trial, made up of spiritualists and those who believed themselves to have been healed by Geoffre. The prisoner's counsel argued that to heal in the manner made use of by his client was not trenching on the field of science and art, but was a religious act, similar to the cures wrought by holy water, or to the sacred fountains at Lourdes and La Salette; and he further argued that to condemn a man on such grounds would arraign many holy things countenanced by the Church, and expose

to a penalty all who believed themselves able to attain by prayer and the ardent love of God what is unattainable by science. The argument was very strong, and may remind us of one used by a French prosecutor in the days of witch-trials, when, in answer to one who denied the power of the devil on earth, he exclaimed,—“Then all this ecclesiastical machinery is a pretence: Heaven itself is equally a dream: the pillars of the Church and of *Paradise* rest upon the floors of the Pit.” The argument which could burn a man then was not able to save a man the other day at Narbonne: Etienne Geoffre was sentenced to pay a fine of five hundred francs, and in default of payment was sent to prison.

The means employed by this French spiritualist for healing were lotions or draughts of water from the river Aude, the laying on of hands, and prayer. Every Saturday the gardener's cottage was besieged by sick people, and it was stated in court that on one occasion fifty carts and carriages were seen collected near his house. Etienne pronounced a prayer over each, causing the sufferer to repeat it after him; he was also careful to pay his homage to the Church by stating that the cures were wrought by the late *Curé d'Ars*.

In passing sentence on Geoffre the court was careful not to deny the reality of the curative effects, which indeed might have led to popular scepticism as to the genuineness of similar effects produced at the holy fountains where the healing mediums wear cowls. The court naïvely endorses spiritualism as a fact, but punishes it for poaching on the ecclesiastical preserves. It will be

obvious to every Protestant that the agitation at Narbonne is part of a general excitement in France related to the popular religion. In old catholic times Scotland was especially noted for the number of its holy springs which the Virgin Mary or other saints had rendered curative. But although Scotland has now many spiritualistic "circles" and "mediums," none of them ever send invalids to the springs which Puritanism declared unholy. On the other hand, in Ireland, where the holy wells and pools are still believed in, spiritualism makes but little headway. Spiritualism finds its stronghold among the Protestants of America and England, because among them Science and Protestantism have cleared away the Virgin, the saints, holy wells and priestly marvels, but, having done so much, have not yet been able to alter the mental atmosphere in which they flourished; they are consequently compelled to see a new growth of saints and miracles under new names. This is evident from the readiness with which spiritualists believe contemporary catholic miracles. Lately, when Professor Lankester wrote to the London *Times* his exposure of an eminent medium, that journal printed it side by side with a letter it had received from Monsignor Capel declaring his faith in a miraculous cure at Lourdes. The *Times* commenting on the Catholic's letter said: "The whole story must be regarded with much the same feeling as is a tale of wonders achieved by a medium." Whereupon the "Spiritualist" newspaper wrote:—"Just so; there is indeed an essential homogeneity throughout the multiform phenomena of the spiritual realm. All are evidently due

to the same unknown agency, the influence of which has ever been powerful on mankind."

To the eye of Comparative Mythology the spiritualised lotion of the Narbonne gardener, the Lourdes fountain, the holy water at the church door, the baptismal font of Protestantism, all represent diminished forms of the sacred Ganges and the diluvial purification of the earth in the traditions of the Ark. The dove, as the first voice of Spring, symbolised in early ages renovation, whether sent out from the ark to hover over a baptised world, or descending on a baptised Christ, or appearing still to the Hindu devotee emerging from the stream of immortality which the god Siva created at Ambah-Naut, where the pilgrim meets that deity in the form of a dove, in whose flight an omen is discerned. Now, in warm and sunny France and other Southern climes, the stream and bathing part of these ancient symbols have been preserved in degrees varying with the climate, from the dipping in fountains in France and Spain to some regions of the Eastern Church, where no man or woman will enter church on Sunday unless they have been bodily under water within the previous twenty-four hours. But in cold and clammy England, by a process of natural selection, the symbolical watery condition of renewal or healing has gradually subsided ; and as the cross remains after the crucified form has been removed, so the dove remains after the renovating water has ceased to be of importance except to a few sects. These facts will show the significance of the following : A distinguished female medium in London states that one night when she was in a trance,

the Holy Ghost came to her in the form of a dove. When she recovered from her trance she observed that there was an actual dove in her room. She procured a large cage for the bird, and fed it with the utmost care. One day the dove, having shed a feather, the medium took it, and, folding it in an envelope, gave it to a sick friend, who was immediately benefited in health by receiving it. Since then she has carefully treasured every feather cast by the dove, divides up each, puts the bits into separate small wrappers shaped like a heart, marks on each the words "Holy Ghost," and these are to-day considered by their spiritualistic owners as possessing the talismanic power to save them from many dangers. The female medium who got up, or was the subject of this remarkable and elaborated vision and scheme, is quite ignorant; she is no Catholic, and probably never saw an *Agnus dei* in her life. Her learning in ancient symbolism probably amounts to having sung in early life the Methodist hymn, "Come, Holy Spirit, Heavenly Dove, with all Thy quickening powers." Yet in the superstition just related, we have the very accent of the dove legend, which has persisted through thousands of years. The little drama is organised after the Protestant form—*i. e.*, without the lavatory associations which are preponderant in the spiritualistic symbolism of the French mediums, who have to deal with a peasantry confirmed in their faith in holy water. But what subtlety and elaboration is here manifested! No solar myth found in our classical dictionaries can be more complete.

VI.

It is obvious that science can do nothing directly against superstitions that grow within their natural *habitat* of ignorance. Science has fairy tales of its own, and marvels which shame the poor miracles of sorcery ; but science has got to proceed as slowly to its decorated temples as ever did the religion which began with a fish-boat for its pulpit, and a handful of working-men for its clergy.

“The present promoters of spiritual phenomena,” says Professor Tyndall, “divide themselves into two classes, one of which needs no demonstration, while the other is beyond the reach of proof. The victims like to believe, and they do not like to be undeceived. Science is perfectly powerless in the presence of this frame of mind. It is, moreover, a state perfectly compatible with extreme intellectual subtlety, and a capacity for devising hypotheses, which only require the hardihood engendered by strong conviction, or by callous mendacity, to render them impregnable. The logical feebleness of science is not sufficiently borne in mind. It keeps down the need of superstition, not by logic, but by slowly rendering the mental soil unfit for its cultivation. When science appeals to uniform experience, the spiritualist will retort ‘how do you know that a uniform experience will continue uniform? You tell me that the sun has risen for six thousand years : that is no proof that it will rise to-morrow ; within the next twelve hours it may be puffed out by the

Almighty.' Taking this ground, a man may maintain the story of 'Jack and the Beanstalk' in the face of all the science in the world. We urge, in vain, that science has given us all the knowledge of the universe which we now possess, while spiritualism has added nothing to that knowledge. The drugged soul is beyond the reach of reason. It is in vain that impostors are exposed, and the special demon cast out; he has but slightly to change his shape, return to his house, and find it 'empty, swept and garnished.' " *

Of one thing, however, science, its representatives and its believers, may now be fully aware, namely, that the established and prevailing religion of Europe and America is systematically fostering the mental soil out of which alone this superstition can grow. Its Christ is a great spirit medium, its credentials are thaumaturgic phenomena, the thing it most discourages is necessarily that faith in the uniformity of nature which were fatal to its authority and influence.

Rational men and women may also take note of the stupendous fact, that in the presence of a new and vast superstition, Christianity has shown itself utterly powerless to check or control it. How can the churches impugn the belief in witches, ghosts, omens, the power of ignorant people and their prayers to change the order of nature, when their own Bible is full of such things, and to deny them is to assail their own foundation?

And as it is with spiritualism, so is it with all other

* "Fragments of Science," p. 321.

superstitions, whether surviving or growing in our time. As the first Christian missionaries did not dare to deny the existence of the pagan deities for fear of admitting a sceptical principle, which would include their own invisible powers, so now the churches dare not defend the principles even of common sense and sanity against the most cruel delusions, because they are, in the like case, with them; to deny them is to surrender to the one enemy alike of ghost-craft and priest-craft—Science.

These delusions (as I must reiterate) will multiply and increase just so long as the leading nations of the earth are without a real religion, whose first characteristic must be to include its best wisdom, its noblest character, and command the conviction and enthusiasm of its most virtuous and scholarly men and women. A religion which has to apologise for its existence to such is already cumbering the ground.

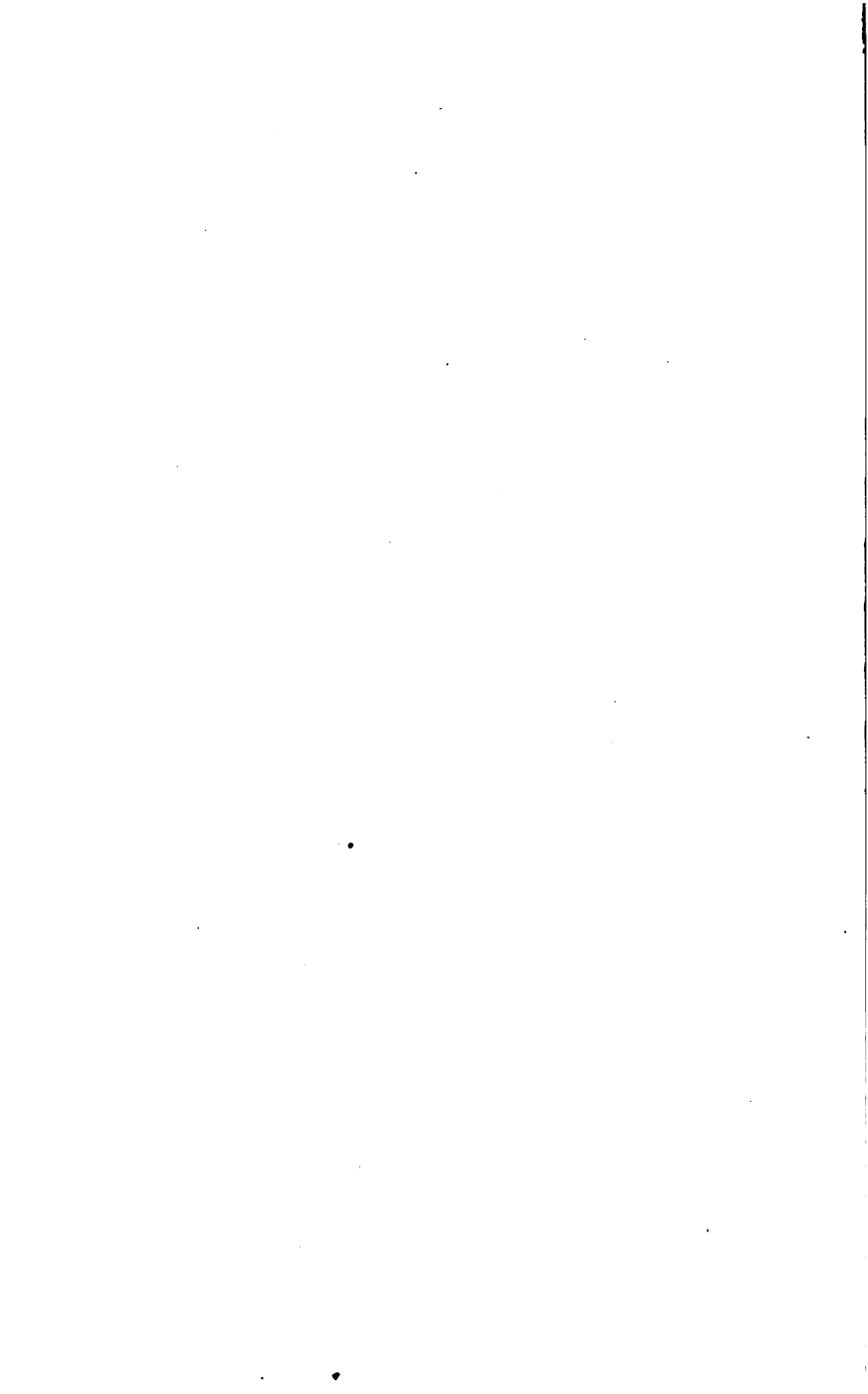
If the very light offered us be darkness, how great is that darkness! The divorce between the culture of a nation and its religious institutions is, as we have seen, a two-edged fact: precisely in the ratio of the abandonment of those institutions by the enlightened, must proceed their corruption. The day that came to Greece and Rome, when every fair god and goddess became hag and demon, has come fearfully upon us. When such a man as Thomas Carlyle, amid his glowing words of love for a clergyman, pauses to describe that clergyman's aberration into orthodox orders, as an entrance on the highway of dead damnable putrescent cant,* we have come upon a

* "Life of Sterling," chap. XV.

formidable crisis. A religion of England detestable to Carlyle is virtually disestablished. Before such alienation of a great heart, a noble genius, a stainless virtue, from the established religion of a country could occur that religion must have long been sinking under the control of its baser elements; and the process of corruption must increase. The creeds and observances unrestrained by the presence and interest of the intelligent and cultivated, must be left more and more to ignorance and vulgarity, to be made into their own wretched image and likeness. The salt being no longer purchasable, the savourless semblance of it alone procurable, decay must go on, poisoning the air more and more with malaria, and breeding foul things that creep and devour.

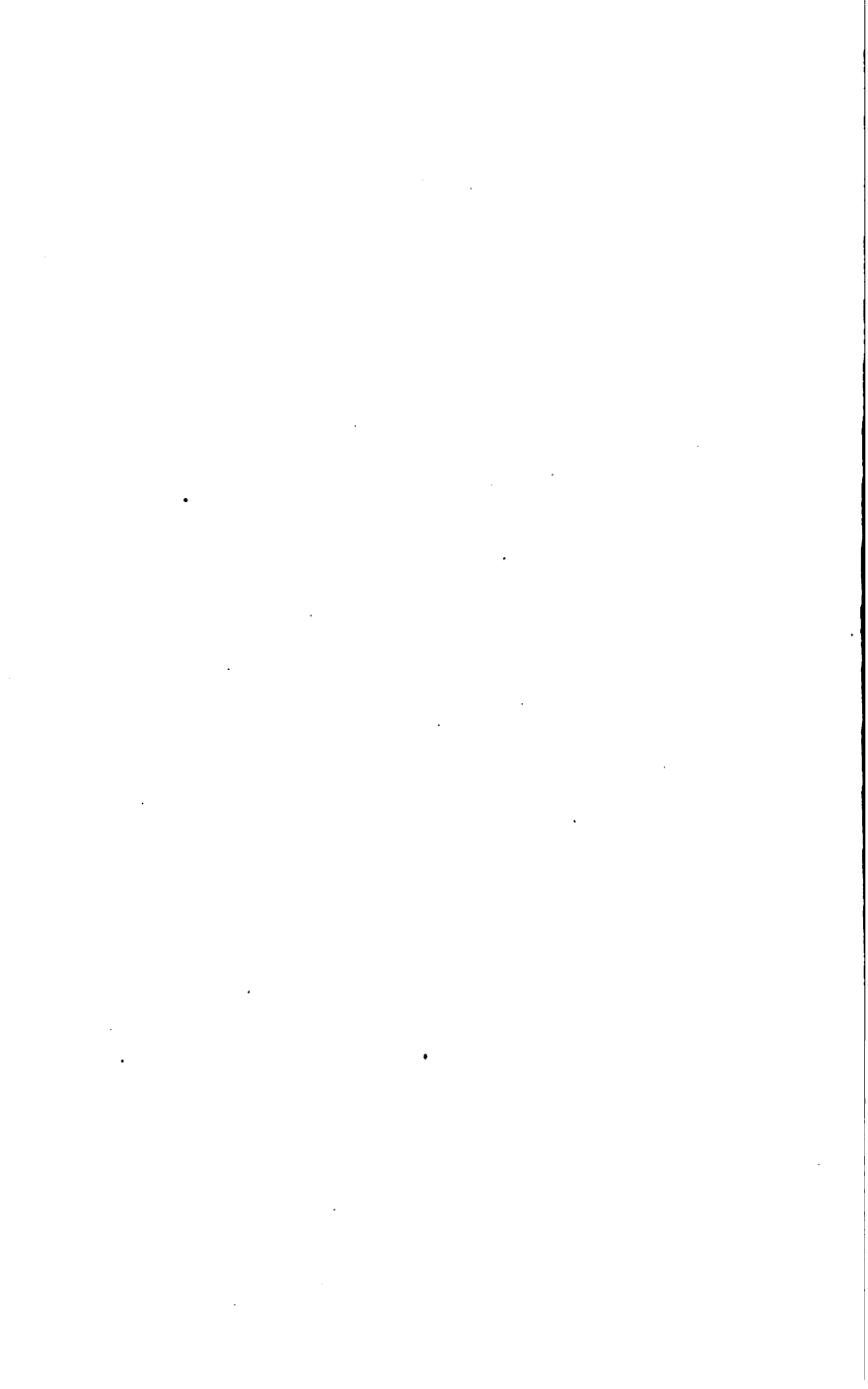
Small things, it may be to-day, to-morrow monsters! If indeed we are destined to see the old dragons of barbarism returning—moral chimæras, fanatic Hydras, revival of Python phantasms,—let all true souls see to it that, so far as lay in them, each shall meet his slayer. Science, education, literature, will be increasingly strong and brave, as they have a free and earnest constituency to uphold them in their ascending, extending light, and we shall find our Apollo, whose arrows shall speed in splendour through the air, and send this brood of darkness back, recoiling to the caves of Night.





III.

FAITH, FACT AND FAIRY TALE.





FAITH, FACT, AND FAIRY TALE.

THERE is a current impression that fairies are not any more believed in, and the booksellers say that even among children fairy tales are going out of fashion. I read lately in a volume of German fairy tales the following lines :—

O the happy, happy season
Ere bright Fancy bent to Reason ;
When the spirit of our stories
Filled the mind with unseen glories ;
Told of creatures of the air,
Spirits, fairies, goblins rare,
Guarding man with tenderest care ;
When before the blazing hearth,
Listening to the tale of mirth,
Sons and daughters, mother, sire,
Neighbours, all drew round the fire,
Lending open ear and faith
To what some learned gossip saith !
But the fays and all are gone,
Reason, Reason reigns alone ;
Every grace and charm is fled,
All by dulness banished ;
Thus we ponder, slow and sad
After Truth the world is mad ;
Ah, believe me, Error too
Hath its charms nor sad nor few.

These lines convey well enough a wide-spread feeling that there is something incongruous between reason and imagination, and that sentiment is chilled by science. I could not but note how odd it was that these lines should be written in a volume of fairy tales whose complete recovery from the past was due to Grimm, a man of science. In folk-lore and fable it is science and rationalism which are preserving antiquity, just as they are preserving our ancient monuments. It is the dull, unreasoning world which would take the dolmens of Stonehenge to build a fence, and treat our fairy tales as mere paganism, were it not for the scholar and the man of science.

It is true that the age of reason, wherever it has gone, deprives the fairy tale of its realism, so that even children are hardly deceived by them any more. But we can hardly deplore this, when we reflect that the child who used to believe in good fairies had also to believe in demons, dragons, and bloodthirsty ogres—lineal descendants of the hell-hound Orcus. Many a child has been kept awake at night, trembling in the dark, for fear of witches riding in at the window on broomsticks. On the whole, we need hardly mourn over the vanished fairies any more than over the vanished gods; that is, the passing away of literal belief in them. All their sentiment is preserved as they appear now on the miniature stage of childish fancy.

The line says, Blessings brighten as they take their flight. It is equally true that things not blessings may look such when they have taken their flight. Just as

Schiller mourned that he could not believe in the gods of Greece, some minds that have not yet given heart and hand to the recognised truth of reason, may bemoan their lost beliefs. But what they remember fondly is only a few rosy features of their orthodoxy,—a Providence to pet them, and prospect of a luxurious Paradise. Just set such minds genuinely back into orthodoxy, the whole system of it, with sulphur smoke coming up to wither all their Paradise, and a jealous god angry every day, and they would be glad to get out of it again. People do not always remember the implications of what they sigh for. They are like the man who sighed for his boyhood again, until the fairy proceeded to grant his wish by taking away his wife and children, whereupon he decided that if he couldn't be a boy and have his wife and children too he would prefer to go on in the old way.

There is a great deal of mistaken sentiment about the early days of childlike faith, and their alleged superior beauty to the age of reason. Now, the truth is, the age of reason represents a small spot on the map of the world, and even at this day the belts surrounding it are shaded off in varying degrees until we find a very large one in which the dark ages still reign. There are places and people enough that still devoutly believe in a religion of fairy tales, and it is by no means difficult to estimate their advantages and disadvantages as compared with those who hold rational opinions.

On the 9th day of October, 1876, the chief London journal contained two very remarkable letters. The one came from Spain, the other from America: by notable

coincidence they appeared on the same day. The letter from Spain gave an account of a Catholic pilgrimage to certain sacred places at Montserrat. Among others the pilgrims devoutly visited a cavern called Juan Garin. They implicitly believe the legend that once there dwelt in that cave a prayerful monk, named Juan Garin, who, however, committed a sin. For that one sin he was transformed into a wild beast, and roamed the forest as such until he was at last restored to humanity by the voice of a child five months old.

The other letter, that from America, related how a huge rock in the bed of a sea was skilfully honey-combed, filled with explosive materials. On a bright Sunday morning—albeit the potent Sabbatarian fairy protested against the desecration—the engineer lifted his little daughter two years of age in his arms, bade her touch a shining button of metal; the dimpled finger touched the metal: that touch exploded 52,000 pounds of powder, and ploughed clear and made safe the chief highway of ships on the eastern coast of America.

What connection is there between the splendid fact from America and the weird legend from Spain? One is a dream of which the other is fulfilment. Not without a certain dim significance of its own is that story of the monk in his cave, sunk by sin to a beast, restored to humanity by a baby's voice. Since that ancient Hebrew vision of the happy era when the earth shall be swayed by gentleness, and the lion and the lamb together be led by a little child, there has been a half-conscious dream in the hearts of the lowly of a day when the pride and violence

of the world shall be brought down, and the child's innocence be stronger than the warrior's ferocity. The wild beast transformed to humanity by a child's voice is but one of innumerable fables that report this pious aspiration of the simple and lowly.

In the American event the dream is realised. Fifty-two thousand pounds represents a force which used destructively might have laid New York in ruins. That is the same power which to-day is desolating Eastern provinces,—the power as wielded by fanaticism sitting in its cavern of superstition, till transformed to a wild beast. It is the power which sleeps to-day in the arsenals and magazines of more civilised Europe, but, unless the voice of peace can master the beast of selfishness, may soon leap forth to make Europe a hell of unchained passions.

But lo! across the ocean, science is seen binding all that wild power to a baby's finger; enables the gentlest touch, guided by pure intelligence, to wield the lightning of fabled Jove, dart it to the heart of a barrier of rock in the sea's depth, there waking an earthquake and directing it to a beneficent aim,—all without harm to a human being! That is the way in which science enables a child to transform and humanise the ferocities of nature.

Now these two stories, which reached here on the same day, remind us that past and present may be, and surely are, morally contemporary. The Spanish belief about Juan Garin is a fairy tale; it is devoutly believed by Catholics, but stories like it were believed in the far East some thousands of years ago. Nay, in North-

umbrian folklore there is a legend of a fair princess transformed by witchcraft to a dragon, but restored by the kiss of love to her proper shape. It stands as a landmark behind the age of England, and indicating the believers in such legends as still dwelling in the dusk of an epoch here declined. The brave work in America which broke the Sabbath so splendidly stands out as a type of the romance and beauty which are to take the place of fairy tales in human belief. It stands out in the tinted dawn of a coming time, when children and aged people shall have unlearned the foolish notion that reason is cold and science dry, and found that all the fairy tales of the world are poor beside the romance of the force that curves the planet and the sea-shell, the story of the sunbeam that paints the star and the dew-drop; the divine mystery of mind which measures the force, tracks the sunbeam, and "dismounts the highest star."

Between those two landmarks—the fairy tale and the fact of science—the faith of millions is now hovering. They whose faith rests upon supernatural signs and wonders are not all so far sunk that they can accept the gross superstitions of a Catholic peasantry. On the other hand they who rest their faith so far as they can on reason do not generally accept the full results of science. But this we may remark, that men give up the supernatural just so fast and so far as they can take in the natural. If you can once get a man to really know a thing in nature, which means to know its laws, he can never again associate anything lawless or monstrous with it, nor desire to do so.

You may begin with what is most universally known among mankind and pass to the less and less known phenomena of nature, and precisely in the ratio of decreasing knowledge is increasing superstition.

Thus no man in England could be found willing to pray that the sun might rise an hour earlier or set an hour later say for the getting in of his harvest. The devout believer in prayer may read with full faith the Hebrew fairy tale which tells how the sun did stand still and lengthen the day at a mortal's petition, and yet he or she would never dream that such an effect could now be produced. The uniformities of the sun's apparent motion have been too patent, too familiar, for superstition to connect itself with that motion. Nor would any one ever turn from the Christian fairy tales to pray that their water tank might yield pure wine, or that a fish just purchased might hold a coin large enough to pay their tax. But when we pass to things of which the laws are not so familiar, we at once observe the tendency of fancy to enter and fill up with phantasms the margin left by knowledge. The shifting clouds, the movements of wind and storm seem so irregular that an arbitrary power is more easily associated with them. And although the fairy tale of Joshua and the sun is as authentic as that of Elijah praying for the rain, yet in all the world nobody prays for a change in the day's course, while some do pray for a change in the weather. However, comparatively few pray for weather, for experience has shown that meteorology also is a science. More pray for health or recovery from sickness, this seeming to be less fixed

in conditions ; and yet nobody ever prays to have the dead raised up. Notwithstanding the many Hebrew and Christian fairy tales which relate the resurrection of the dead, the necessary laws of death are too well known for any one to try and secure any alteration.

This proportionate decrease of belief in the supernatural with the extent of knowledge does not mean that the knowledge has eradicated superstition as a principle. Many who do not believe that any power can change the course of sun or seasons or weather, yet fully believe in miracles. Really, it means that wherever nature is appreciated, super-nature is not wanted. What mankind hate and dread is a blind, soulless, purposeless world. Where they see no law, they see no beauty ; where there is only hard and heartless matter, human nature cannot bear it, and must needs people it with goddesses, nymphs, fairies, angels, or even imps. These are mere make-shifts to fill the awful vacancy which knowledge has not yet come to fill up with fact and order. Carlyle exclaims, "Shams are burnt out, the realities have not come." Whenever the realities have come, they are always satisfactory, and the fictions easily pass away. Wherever knowledge goes, it liberates man from mere matter ; it abolishes the gross object by showing it to be a transparency of beautiful laws, reflecting the glory of the universe.

Every Protestant can see this in the case of other fictions than his own.

I have just been reading a French book, by Paul Parfait, entitled "*L'arsenal de Devotion*," in which the author

gives a detailed account of all the miracles wrought in France by holy fountains, such as Lourdes and La Salette, and by holy images. He gives them as represented by the priests and devotees in their own language. This list of contemporary miracles fills a considerable volume. They are authenticated by the highest church authority. No one reading these narratives can fail to see that fairies are believed in just as much as ever by the French peasantry ; though they are baptised fairies. The queen of the fairies is the Virgin Mary. Precisely in the style of the old fairy tales, she appears to some poor little child wandering in the woods, and loads her with favours. But she is not to be trifled with, this potent fairy. Thus, in one instance a mother has a very ill child ; the physicians confess they cannot save it. The mother takes her child to the fountain of Lourdes, sprinkles on it a little of that water which gushed up where the Virgin appeared, and lo ! the child is in perfect health. But mark the sequel. When the mother took her child home, she again trusted to the physicians, and again the child sank to the point of death. So she had to hurry off once more to the fountain, and the child was again well. The Virgin Mary is so jealous of medical science, that she must have caused her first benefit to cease, and the child to sink a second time, knowing that the mother would again call in a doctor, and again all skill would fail but that of her fountain ; and all in order that her triumph over science might be doubly marked ! There are hundreds of stories like this, and the swarms of pilgrims who visit such places show how genuine is the faith and

satisfaction they yield to the Catholic peasantry. The time was when Scotland was the great place for such healing fountains, yet it would be hard now to find any Scotchman who has the least interest in them. No Protestant desires any such fountains or fables. Once they were cherished as dearly in this country as in France. The Catholics pity the poor Protestants, who are without such supernatural aid and comfort when they are suffering. The Protestant laughs at it as all childish nonsense. Read them in the Bible—read how Naaman the leper was healed in a holy stream, or the miraculous cures wrought by the pool of Bethesda, where an angel appeared—and there it is divine revelation; so at least the Protestant says, but reveals that it has become to him a fairy tale, so often as he ridicules the Bethesdas of France. And these things have passed away, not merely because they were disproved, or rested on insufficient evidence, but because, under increasing knowledge, they ceased to be lovely or loveable; they paled before the grandeurs revealed by Kepler, Linnaeus, Newton. As the Scandinavian gods diminished into pixies and goblins, so shrank the Christian apparitions that followed them. They were no longer beautiful to eyes which had caught sight of things higher and holier.

Just as little satisfaction can a mind find in Protestant fairies and fairy tales when it has out-grown belief in their reality. They must pass away just as Catholic fables have passed, and it will then be seen that there was no genuine comfort in them, such as the truth of nature can give. They who fancy there is more warmth, support,

joy in the old superstitions, and would be glad to believe them, are they who have not yet given their faith where their intellects have pointed. They stand between the old temple and the new, shivering in the cold, without the joy of either. But Truth is as jealous as our fabulous Lady of Lourdes, and will by no means bestow her favours on those who trust themselves still to the dogmatic doctors. We must give a living and whole heart to our faith whatever it may be, if we would get from it a warm heart in return. I do not say that all ought to become scientific in a technical sense ; but I do say that all should study to know more of nature. Every child should be brought up to know that there is a wonderland all around it. Each should know that every leaf has a story to tell, and every insect, and that a secret is written on every pebble. Every family should try to have a microscope to unlock the door which opens to rarer treasures than any "Sesame" of fable. The heart and mind cannot be fed on dust ; but only by that living thought under whose breath the dust floats up into golden galaxies.

There is one respect in which the believers in the fairy-tale religion may be our models ; childish as may be their beliefs, they are alive. They will not rest upon a mere historic religion wrapped in fossil language, they will have their saints, virgin, spirits, angels all around them, and as many miracles as antiquity. Again the divine command comes to our age—"Seek not the living among the dead." I respect all that fermentation going on in our own time and nation, which indicates a striving for a divine life here and now, even though it may show itself

in the spiritualistic or the ritualistic real presence or other credulities. What that spirit craves is destined to be satisfied by deeper study of nature, which shall show every atom mystical,—instinct with law, life, purpose ; by profounder insight into the heart of man, revealing in it all marvels, all the past and present alive and at work in it, there calmly throned all vanished gods and angels,—there towering Iran, Sinai, and Olympus ; there Eden, and the Bethlehem stars that lead with holy light to new Edens, illumining the universe with love and immortal hope.



IV.

THE PRAYING MACHINE.



THE PRAYING MACHINE.

SOME time ago I had the good fortune to receive two interesting presents. One was from an anonymous benefactor, and consisted of a Buddhist book, beautifully written on leaves of bark, from a Burmese temple. The other present was sent me by an Anglo-Indian officer, and consisted of a Praying Machine such as is commonly used in Thibet. The two things came from widely different quarters, but they are strangely connected. The book consists of the first teachings of Buddha. It opens with what is traditionally his very first discourse to some Brahmins who had begun to follow him, but were afterwards offended and forsook him. These Brahmins had clung to Buddha while at the outset of his religious career he was undergoing those terrible self-mortifications by which he was brought to the last degree of attenuation. This was a kind of sanctity traditional with the Brahmins, and which they could understand. But when Buddha, after his vision of the angel with the guitar of three strings—the loosely-drawn which gave no music, the too tightly-drawn which gave an un-

pleasant sound, the moderately-drawn which yielded sweet sounds—learned the lesson of moderation, and began to eat and drink, the Brahmins abandoned him for their aseetic priests. But Buddha, who had recovered his vigour and beauty, sought and found them in the city of Benares. Then he addressed to them the discourse with which the Burmese scripture opens ; as follows :—

“O priests ! these two extremes should be avoided—an attachment to sensual gratifications, which are degrading and profitless ; and severe penances which cause pain, but are equally degrading and profitless.

“O priests ! avoiding both these extremes I have perceived a middle path for the attainment of mental vision, true knowledge, subdued passions, and insight into the paths leading to the supreme good.

“O priests ! this middle path (consists of) correct doctrines, right apprehension of these doctrines, speaking the truth, purity of conduct, an innocent calling, perseverance in duty, holy meditation, and mental tranquillity.”

Such were the noble thoughts that choired the birth of Buddhism into the world. Behold in the praying machine, the little metallic barrel four inches long, three in diameter, what Buddhism has ended in for a large proportion of the millions who believe in it, or think they do. In many regions where Buddhism reigns the masses hope to obtain perfection and final bliss by whirling it around at the end of a string as they walk. When standing still they insert a handle in each end and turn it faster.

It is packed full of paper, on each particle of which is

written some sacred charm, mantra or sentence,—packed until the mass is quite solid. Nearly every sentence is this: “Om mani padme huom.” The chief sanctity of these words is that nobody on earth knows just what they mean. They are transmitted probably from a Sanskrit older than the Sanskrit known to scholars, or, as some conjecture, from an early and lost form of Pâli. Their first and last words, however, “Om ” and “Huom,” may possibly be cognate to that word “Amen” which is so often used by Christians with as little knowledge of its meaning.

Now, this praying barrel, every revolution of which is supposed to influence spirits, angels, genii, or even Buddha himself to the advantage of the devotee, is in singular contrast with the religion of Buddha, who did not even teach the existence of a God, much less the notion of prayer. His whole method of religion was inward, silent meditation, and outward benevolence. That his religion should be overlaid by such trivial forms and practices as now represent it is a remarkable instance of the helplessness of devout emotion and religious enthusiasm to prevail against hereditary superstitions, unless assisted by mental culture among the people. Every great thinker appearing among ignorant people has been a light shining amid the darkness that comprehendeth it not—but can only blindly adore it while it lasts, as if it were some comet.

The praying-machine is itself the last form of a symbol far older than Buddha, and represents equally the decline into an unmeaning form of a once significant symbol.

When Buddhism took to praying-machines it was because of the decay of both—it was ruin mingling with ruin. One of the first things carved on the ancient monuments of the world was the foot and wheel. Archæologists think that it originally indicated the superior powers of those who rode in chariots—the foot added to the wheel denoted fleetness. And there were days when superiority in fleetness made one a king among men. This secular symbol gradually became sacred, as with ignorance things commonly do, when their meaning is gone. The human imagination got hold of it just as it has taken up the cross and twined it with a thousand exotic meanings. The wheel became the circle of the universe—its motion became the symbol of ascending and descending life—it was the sun,—the moon,—all manner of glorious things. Even our British ancestors became possessed in some mysterious way of this symbol, and used to roll a burning wheel down a hill-side at the Solstice, as an image of the solar movement.

When Buddhism was preached among the nations which had this wheel-symbol, it followed the plan of all missionary religions ; it borrowed the sacred emblems among the people to whom it went. It is doubtful whether Buddha himself knew anything about the wheel ; but, in nearly all the countries into which his religion was carried, it became represented at an early period by what is called the Wheel of the Law. The holy wheel from being a sort of fetish long ago became spiritualised. First, it was interpreted to mean a system of morals,—every spoke a virtue, and the circumference complete

and rounded moral life. Next, it was taken up by philosophy, and made to represent a great circle of transmigration. And finally it became the form of a cosmogony,—the holy mountain Meru being the centre of the earth, and around it wheels within wheels revolving—such as the belt of oceans, the belt of the world's crystal walls, and the great circles of stars and of angels.

The sacred wheel from being all this became an amulet, inscribed with sacred texts. Gradually, as is likely, it was made hollow, and the texts written on paper were stuffed into it. In that way, probably, was developed the little praying barrel, or hollow metallic wheel, whose circular movement has in its time represented the rising and setting stars, the birth and death of man, and even the pure circle of graces and virtues.

The best use we can make of it would seem to be to make of it a mirror, and find whether there may not be in our own Christendom much that corresponds to this miserable form into which a great soul and movement have been dwarfed. There is no difficulty in finding praying-machines in Europe. The Rosary, for instance, is directly borrowed from the Buddhists, who string nuts together to count their prayers by, and regard so many rounds of their rosary as reaching a certain advantage, just the same as so many revolutions of the praying-machine. The simple-hearted Jesuit Father Rubruquis, who went to Thibet just six centuries ago, wrote home, "They (Buddhists) have with them also, whithersoever they go, a certain string, with 100 or 200 nutshells thereupon, much like our beads, and they do always

mutter these words, '*Om mani hactavi*,—God thou knowest,' as one of them expounded it to me. And so often do they expect a reward at God's hands as they pronounce these words in remembrance of God." If the old man had gone more deeply into the matter, he would have found many more resemblances. For instance, he would have found Buddhists repeating litanies like this :—

I adore the Tatàgata, the universally radiant sun !
 I adore the Tatàgata, the moral wisdom !
 I adore the Tatàgata, the chief lamp of all the regions of space !

and so on for 137 verses. It might have recalled to Rubruquis the many verses in his own litany.

Heart of Mary, full of grace, pray for us !
 Heart of Mary, sanctuary of the Holy Trinity, &c.,
 Heart of Mary, tabernacle of the Incarnate Word, &c.,
 Heart of Mary, illustrious throne of glory, &c.

What is it in the praying-machine which strikes us as grossly superstitious and barbarous? Several things. First of all, there are in it those vain repetitions which Jesus rebuked in the formulas of his time. These deteriorated Buddhists think they shall be heard for their much rolling of barrels. Does that idle notion survive in Christendom? What shall be said of the oft-recurring "Good Lord deliver us!" and "We beseech thee to hear us, Good Lord," of the prayer-book and its feeble imitations? Then we have the vain repetitions—

Lord have mercy upon us !
 Christ have mercy upon us !
 Lord have mercy upon us !
 Christ have mercy upon us !
 Son of God, we beseech thee to hear us !
 Lamb of God, we beseech thee to hear us !

And there are other instances of the same sort which compel every clergyman to be a praying-machine. We all know what is the result of such repetitions. The formula uttered in such routine loses reality—degenerates into an incantation among the ignorant, into cant among the educated.

But there are many Christians around us who have rejected these formulas and repetitions of the Church. They are not indeed entirely guiltless of this great vice of the Roman and Anglican Churches, however, for they repeat certain incantations in their prayers,—such as “Amen,” and “through Jesus Christ our Lord,” and other stock phrases which they tell over and over again like the beads of a rosary. But there is a coarse superstition embodied in the praying-machine which all sects share alike ; one which is inherent in the very nature of prayer. It is the belief implied that the benefits of this universe are to be secured by the perfunctory lip-service or barrel-service of human beings. It is impossible to think of one of those orientals turning his praying machine otherwise than as some poor fellow in the street grinding over and over again on his barrel-organ a well-known stock of dismal tunes in hope of an occasional penny from the heavenly windows. And the man of the machine may describe in the same way the tedious routine of Christian prayers, beseeching God to throw out a mercy or two from His abundance. Nay, he might well claim that his plan of doing this sort of thing by machinery is the best of the two, since it leaves the man free to sit in silent meditation, which is of some value, while his wheel

is turning. And if the interpretation of the mysterious phrase so multiplied in the barrel which was given to the Jesuit father, "God thou knowest," be the popular one—it is not the right one—why then our popular appeals to God for this and that thing are by no means so elevated as the submissive sentence of the Buddhist.

It is not denied that the system of prayer was once real. The Buddhist wheel was once a great reality. Buddha himself was once a great reality. But as in the progress of the world the oriental symbol and the religion have lost spontaneity, and at last meaning, and now remain only in fossils—interesting for study, but useless for their original purpose—so it is certain that the discoveries of universal law have reduced prayer among us to an anachronism. It makes no difference whatever whether the prayer be for a moral, or an intellectual, or a physical benefit. If it is absurd for a man to set himself to acquire a fortune by praying for it, it is equally absurd for students to try and pass their examination by prayer instead of study—an absurdity which protestants can see when for such help priests invite students to visit the fountain of Lourdes; but neither is more absurd than to pray for morality, for character, for virtue or religion, all of which are equally dependent on the invariable laws of cause and effect.

There were high moments in the lives of the apostles when they rose above such current superstitions, and warned men that spiritual were no less certain and invariable than physical laws. "Be not deceived," said one, "that which a man soweth he shall reap." "Be

not deceived," cried another, "he that doeth righteousness is righteous." They who said these things were not Christians. The term Christianity—which means an attempt to substitute the virtue of Christ for our virtue, and the task of the year one for the work of 1877—that sectarian term by which a living heart was prisoned in a machine, creed-machine, praying-machine—was not yet invented. But that solemn warning, "Be not deceived!" was speedily lost. Christianity came, and still is with us, proclaiming, "That which a man soweth he shall escape reaping by prayer;" "he that doeth righteousness is not righteous, unless he prays; he will go to hell no matter what good he does, unless he prays." This idea that the great moral laws depend on the breath of our lips is a sad declension from the heights of ancient faith and knowledge. There is a notion abroad that the perception of the essential superstitiousness of prayer is a modern opinion. Some people appear to think that the movement against prayer originated with our English men of science. But it is nearer the truth to say that every great religious soul in the far past contributed something to that profounder reverence, that deeper sense of the eternal laws, which have shown prayer to be a presumptuous, albeit unconscious attempt to cajole the universe. The ancient testimonies of prophets and sages against the whole theory of prayer, and even its form, are innumerable—nowhere more so than as recorded in the Bible. "The Lord said unto Moses, wherefore criest thou unto Me? Speak unto the children of Israel that they go forward."—(Ex. 14.) In all the

wanderings of Israel in Egypt this seems to have been the only time Moses prayed, and then his strong conscience rebuked him for asking a god to do his work. Among the Ten Commandments he brought down from Sinai not one commanded men to pray,—though there is one about taking the name of Jehovah in vain, which millions of prayers are violating this day. It is true that Moses is said to have instituted sacrifices, and these are of the nature of prayers ; it is pretty certain that the sacrifices which his name labelled are the invention of a late priesthood, and that Moses never commanded people wandering in a wilderness to offer their god flocks and herds, doves and lambs, which they did not possess ; but, even were it so, it would only show that he had not outgrown at all points the superstitions in which he was trained. But what do we find among the great prophets who followed him ? Denunciations of sacrifice, burnt-offerings, and the prayers uttered with them. “ Bring no more vain oblations,”—such was the still small voice as Isaiah heard it ; “ incense is an abomination to me ; even so are your sabbaths ; when you stretch forth your hands I see not ; when ye pray I hear not. Learn to do well. Seek justice. Redress wrongs. Help the poor.” Such utterances are to be found in the Bible by hundreds. Who can ever read without feeling its rebuke to the ceremonies of Christendom that sublime summing up of true worship by the prophet Micah,—“ What doth the Lord thy God require of thee but to deal justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with thy God ? ” Parallel to those prophetic rebukes of all formularies was the sweep-

ing rebuke by Christ of all public prayer whatever,—prayers in street or synagogue. Jesus may not indeed have seen that prayer is irrational in itself, though it is certain he never uttered the prayers put by reporters in his mouth : he died young, and did not outgrow all the superstitions around him ; but one thing is clear, he would respect no prayer uttered outside of the closet, and that is enough to rebuke all our litanies, kneelings, grace-mutterings at table, and every other performance of the European praying machine. If a doubtful chapter be founded on true tradition, Jesus seemed indeed to be near to the higher truth when he told his friends he would not pray for them, since that might imply that God required some suggestion or intercession in order to love them. Paul seemed to feel the inconsistency of prayer when he said, “We know not how to pray for anything as we ought,” and that this must be left to the deep spirit within, whose pleadings cannot, he says, be uttered in words.

In the great regenerating epochs of other nations, in which their religions were born, we find a similar repugnance to this cheap sentimental way of supplicating God, when great work is to be done. We do not find that Buddha or Confucius ever prayed, and Zoroaster sang happy hymns and invocations, but offered no petitions. Mahomet’s terrible Allah did indeed command prayer, but even Mahomet desired his followers to attend prayer chiefly during the night, so that the day might be devoted to work. All such testimonies against praying are mixed : these men lived among uncivilised people, amid myriad

superstitions ; and we must judge them by the tendency of their teachings. These teachings are sometimes marvellously clear. The testimony of Isaiah against prayer is clear. The rebuke of Confucius to those who try to do service to gods is plain. The great Persian poet Kàli had learned the lesson more clearly than his prophet when he wrote eight centuries ago, "Only the low-minded can pray to God for benefits on earth."

Some theoretical defenders of prayer are indeed inclined to accept the view of Kàli, and confine petitions to such as implore spiritual benefits. But here Cicero meets them with his rational principle that a man may rather ask the gods for fortune or a good harvest, which his unaided powers can not always command, but that it is base to pray for virtue, whose value consists essentially in the self-denial and labours of which it is the result. We can not doubt that Plato represented the best thought of Greece when he laid down in his Laws that they who believed the gods could be propitiated by sacrifices and prayers, or turned from their purpose by bribes and praises ; that they who taught men (I use Plato's own phrase) "to fawn upon the gods as dogs fawn on their keepers to get some favour ;" should be kept in confinement for five years, and set free then on proof of recovered sanity. Plato held that to spread the delusion that the results of human conduct could be escaped by flattering deities was a danger to the state, and so far he was perfectly right. Every time this nation executes a criminal, whom priests say God has fully pardoned—and sends him from a life of villainy to an eternity of bliss, all

obtained by his and his priest's prayers,—a license to every scoundrel is proclaimed, and an indulgence to crime more demoralising than was ever issued by any Pope. While it is notorious that crime is aided by the uncertainties of human law, we support thousands of pulpits to proclaim that the laws and penalties of the universe and of God are all uncertain,—or still worse, that the criminal may appeal successfully to some heavenly Home Office against the sentence of his country. The truth is any belief contrary to the law of cause and effect is demoralising to the individual or the nation, for that which can be set aside by priest or prayer is no law at all. The very meaning of natural law is that which is invariable and inflexible. Prayer rests upon the wild fancy that the rule of the universe is variable, flexible—in fact, that there is no such thing as LAW for the moral nature. If that be true, the revolution of the solar system may naturally depend on the revolution of a Burmese praying barrel ; and the moral destinies of Humanity depend on the screams of revivalists. But let no man fancy he is any wiser in praying for God's love than he would be in praying for the sun to shine all night ; nor let any man fancy that his round of Christian prayers is a whit better than the revolving litanies of Thibet.

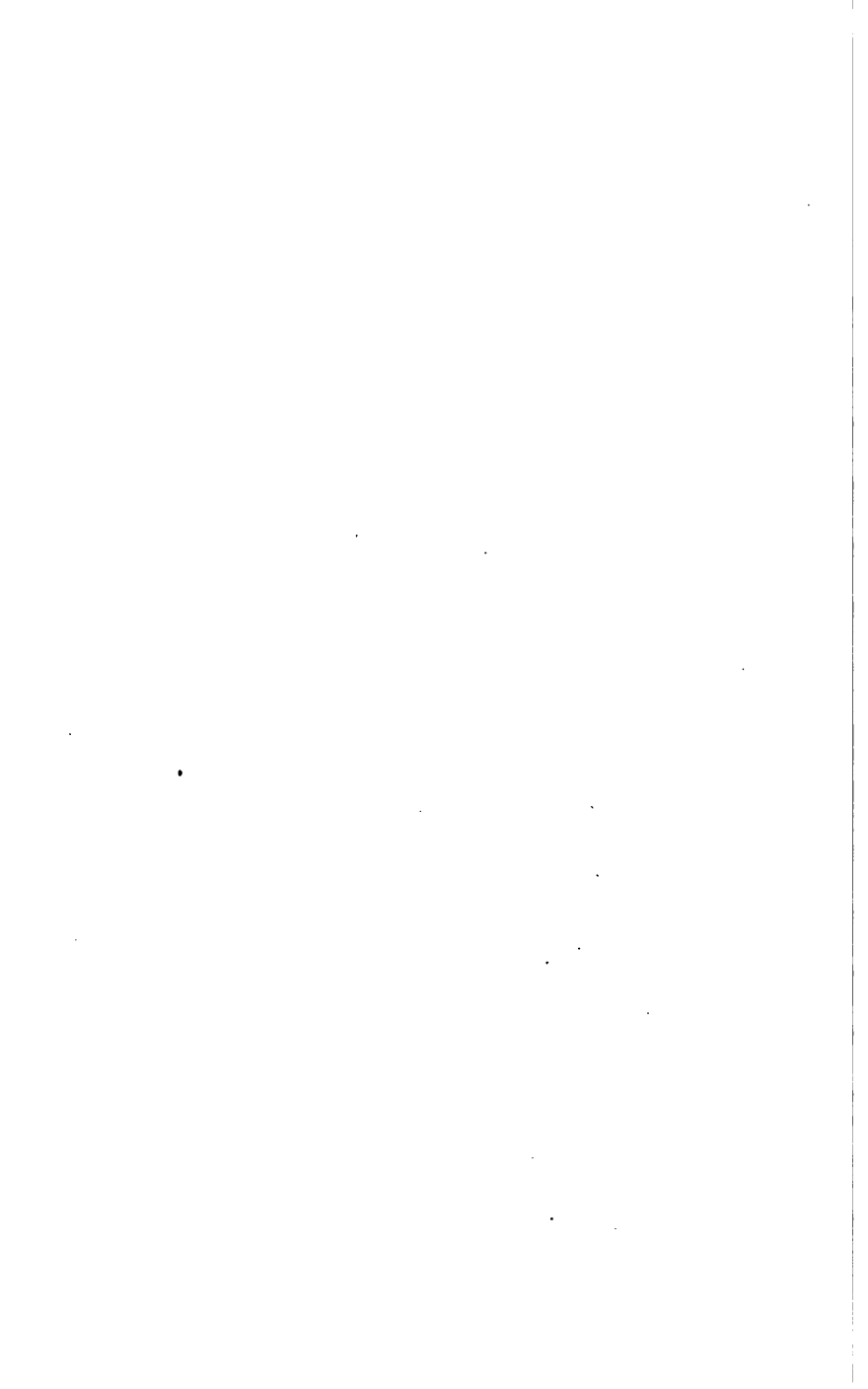
Remembering the greatness of the great, then looking upon the poor dead signs that conventionalise and stand for them,—the wheel, the Kaaba stone, the cross,—we may recall those pathetic legends which of old went round the world, in which every people held that its leaders never died, but are only sleeping in some

enchanted grot or isle whence they will some day return to fulfil the dreams of their country. In the creed of Folklore, Jâmi, St. John, Barbarossa, Charlemagne, Arthur, Kalewala, Tell, Boabdil, Sebastian, and even the Hiawathas and Gloscaps of American tribes, did not taste of death : they will return when some hour of opportunity shall strike, or when some fortunate mortal shall unsheathe the sword they wielded, and blow the old bugle that called their comrades from afar. Corresponding to all these are the teachers and prophets on whom the hag Superstition has cast her spell. Their spirit prisoned in the letter, their thought and heart-pulses arrested, they stand as the idols of innumerable caves, biding the time when a courage and inspiration like their own shall lead them forth into the full glory of their aim and ideal. When universal Justice holds the sword of power on earth, then will the sleeping heroes stir and start up ! When pure Reason reigns in the cult and culture of civilized nations then will the spell-bound sages and prophets emerge ! At the advent of the last incarnation,—pure reason organised in humanity,—they shall all come forth to offer their royal gifts, and shine anew in the world's transfiguration.



v.

THE PRE-DARWINITE AND POST-
DARWINITE WORLD.





THE PRE-DARWINITE AND POST-DARWINITE WORLD.

I.

IN estimating the general bearings of a purely scientific statement it is first of all necessary to know just what that statement is; and, secondly, it is necessary to translate it into the largest expression of which it admits.

The doctrine of evolution, as interpreted and applied by the man whose name is now preeminently associated with it, is the consummate result to which the great highways of discovery had long tended before they converged. Over one hundred years ago the ancient speculations were recalled by Buffon, who said, "There is but one animal." This grew through Buffon's pupil Lamarck to the theory of an evolution by fits and starts, something like that popularised in England in the book entitled "The Vestiges of Creation." It gained a more scientific expression with Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, who affirmed the unity of all parts of the animal body, and indicated that "balance of organs" by which each form was shown to be only another transformation of the common type. That all bones are vertebræ was discovered

by Oken, who also demonstrated, in 1805, that all animals are built up out of vesicles or cells. Bichat was engaged in the work of showing the bearing of these facts upon the structure of man when unhappily his life terminated in 1771. Goethe extended the same principle to the morphology of plants. In England Dr. Erasmus Darwin struck the theme somewhat poetically, which his famous grandson has made into the great scientific generalisation of our time. Thus the Darwinian theory of evolution had great forerunners. It is no empirical speculation, no isolated or eccentric fancy. It is the apex of a great pyramid of facts and researches resting solidly and squarely upon the graduated formations of knowledge in all time, and built up by the certain method of science.

Nor, in saying this, do I detract from the just fame of the man who has summed up and named the great series of preceding discoveries. The finest genius can do no greater work for us than that of filtrating, combining, and organising the mass of facts, and of applying to the full extent methods which had hitherto been doing but slight and partial service. That the telegraph was used in a German lecture-room long before it was known to society, does not detract from the grandeur of the achievement which has made it flash the thought of man through sea and mountain round the world. The great man does not create the laws of nature: he discovers them, he studies them, he applies them, he obeys them. Nor is he less a discoverer who discerns where a principle may be truly applied, and so recovers from chaos a realm of knowledge, than he who originally discovered the prin-

ciple. Darwin inherited the principle of evolution, but he discovered that form of it through which alone it could simplify, revise, and harmonise every branch of human knowledge. He merits, therefore, the acknowledgment I once heard expressed by a distinguished American, that he had restored to England the intellectual sceptre of Europe. That sceptre had passed to the hand of Germany, but now every civilised nation looks again to England, as it looked in the days of Bacon and in those of Newton.

II.

What, then, is the Darwinian theory? It is that all the organic forms around us, from lowest to highest, have been evolved the one from the other by means of the principle of natural selection. Natural selection is the obvious law that every power or trait which better adapts an animal to live amid its surroundings enables that animal to survive another which has not the same power or trait. The fit outlive the unfit. And because they outlive their inferiors they will propagate their species more freely. Their offspring will inherit their advantages; by the laws of heredity will still further improve upon them; and thus there will be a cumulative storing up of such advantages established. Each form less furnished with resources to maintain itself is crowded out before the increase of forms which are better supplied with hereditary abilities. A sufficient accumulation of slight advantages amount in the end to a new form or species. An accumulation of specific advantages will be summed up in a new genus.

And thus, as Emerson has said—

“Striving to be man, the worm
Mounts through all the spires of form.”

Now, to the merely scientific mind evolution is simply a scientific generalisation. In its light he beholds the sprouting leaf hardening to a stem, unpacking itself to a blossom, swelling again to the pulpy leaf, called fruit. He inspects the crustacean egg; sees the trilobite in the embryo stretching into a tiny lobster, shortening into a crab; and says, trilobite, lobster and crab pass from one to the other in this little egg-world, as the new theory shows they did in the big world. He will be interested to find out the intervening steps of improvement between one form and another, and will fix upon this or that animal as the one from which a consummate species budded. But, as I have stated, a truth in any one department of knowledge is capable of being translated into every other. We are already familiar with a popular translation of the Darwin theory in the phrase which explains it as meaning that men are descended from monkeys. And by this common interpretation many conclude that it implies a degradation of the human species. But that phrase does not convey the truth of the theory any more than if a rough pediment in the museum were declared to be the splendid temple of Diana of Ephesus. For behind each one of the forms evolving higher, there stretch the endless lines and processions of the forms which combined to produce it. The ape may appear ugly seen as he is among us, detached from his environment, when contrasted with man; but he is royal

When contrasted with a worm in the mud. But neither worm nor ape can be truly seen when detached from the cosmical order and beauty. It matters little what rude form sheathed the first glory of a human brain. It does not rob the opal of its beauty that its matrix was common flint, nor does it dim the diamond's lustre that it crystallised out of charcoal. The ape may be the jest of the ignorant, but the thinker will see behind him the myriad beautiful forms which made him possible. What wondrous forests of fern and vine grew in voiceless ages, clothing the hard primæval rock, what flowers rich and rare brodered the raiment of the earth! What bright insects flashed through their green bowers, what gorgeous birds lit up the deep solitudes with torch-like plumage! Through a thousand ages the shining swimmers darted through pool or air; for unnumbered generations star-gemmed creatures, lithe and beautiful, sprang through jungle and forest: they browse peacefully on hill and meadow; they slake their thirst at crystal streams; they pursue their savage loves in wood and vale; with mighty roar, with sweetest melody, they chant the music by which the world marches onward and upward,—onward and upward for ever! Millions pass away—millions advance: from every realm of nature they come to add their fibre of strength or tint of beauty to the rising form; beneath every touch, with every tribute it ascends,—till at last, lodged for a moment in some rugged human-like form for combination, the selected concentrated powers expand into man—the sum of every creature's best!

The right translation of this theory for us is, then

that it shows man to be the offspring, not of an ape, but of the animated universe ; the heir of its richest bounties ; the consummate work of a matchless Artist, a figure of which all preceding forms were but sketches and studies. Admitting—though it is an extreme and questionable concession—that the theory has not yet fortified itself completely by demonstrations in detail of the connecting links between species, yet it has certainly shown such an immense balance of probabilities in its favour as to command the adhesion of the scientific world to a greater extent than the Newtonian theory of gravitation did within the same time after its discovery. It may be affirmed that there is now not a single great man of science in the world who does not maintain that in one way or another species were continuously evolved.

III.

But what effect has this theory on religion or moral philosophy? We all know that it has awakened earnest controversies. There are several ways in which it has been regarded. One class of religious teachers, seeing that the verdict of the scientific world in its favour is beyond appeal, have been assuring us that it can have no effect upon religion whatever. Dean Stanley, too liberal and scholarly not to recognise the facts, recently admonished an audience that it mattered nothing at all to them whether it should turn out that man is descended from the animal world, or lower still, as the Bible said, from the inanimate dust of the earth, for right would still be right, and

wrong, wrong; and we should still feel that we are individual souls. What he said was true, but the tone of his remark was that this is a question quite aside from the great religious problems of our time.

They who indulge this hope will very soon find it delusive. It has never been the case that a great scientific generalisation has failed to be reflected in the religious and moral convictions of mankind. The instinctive horror which priesthoods have of science has been developed by a long experience of the certainty with which theological changes have followed scientific discoveries. If any one will study the conditions of religious thought in this country before and after the discoveries of Newton, he will see that by those discoveries the whole controversy was shifted, theology was revolutionised; old questions died, new problems arose; nay, theology itself declined in England from that day. When I have had the pleasure of sitting in the historic Abbey of Westminster and listening to such rationalism from its Dean as would have sent a preacher in old times to the stake, I have reflected that beneath that floor lies the dust of Isaac Newton. And when England had advanced sufficiently to bury in the shrine of her best and greatest that scientific revolutioniser of thought, himself a Unitarian (Sir Charles Lyell), there was planted another of the seeds that have flowered into the rationalism which inspires her most venerable and powerful pulpit. The Dean himself is the best answer to his own suggestion, that religion can stand still while science moves. It cannot stand still. And the reason is plain:

that which represents religion in Europe is a set of dogmas based upon the Bible, and the Bible is not only a religious but a scientific book; it contains a system of theories as to the origin and the facts of nature. This system was the speculation of an ignorant tribe in an ignorant age of the world. Yet theology blended its religious dogmas with these scientific speculations; and as, in the progress of knowledge, these crude fancies of the infant world about nature are necessarily set aside by successive discoveries, the dogmas must go with them. Insensibly men feel that a tribe so mistaken about visible nature, must naturally have been mistaken about invisible nature. The people find that they have been deceived by their religious teachers,—deceived about the sky, about the earth, and their own origin,—and they imbibe a suspicion of those teachers. An atmosphere of suspicion settles around every church and priest. Universal scepticism prevails. It is that scepticism which in England has quenched the fires of Smithfield, abolished tithes, opened Universities to heresy, and which steadily severs Church from State,

IV.

On the other hand there are theologians who instead of indulging the dream that the Darwinian theory will leave religion just where it was before, announce that it is cutting the faith of man up by the roots. They declare that it abolishes God, destroys the hope of immortality, and resolves morality itself into a mere mechanic force.

Such phantoms are familiar, but they become more thin with each reappearance. Our fathers heard that the pillars of the universe had fallen again and again, when it only turned out that somebody's little idol had collapsed. "The giving up of the sun's motion is giving up the foundation of religion," said they who burned the book of Copernicus and the body of Bruno. "The giving up of witchcraft is giving up the Bible," said Sir Matthew Hale. We have grown accustomed to such alarms, and can consider such things with the assured calmness of long experience.

Unquestionably a revolution has occurred. No one can peruse the common literature of the day without recognising that the theory of Darwin has given the world new eyes with which to look at nearly everything. Each truth is a mother-truth, and brings forth a family of other truths. The faculties of man, too, are a fraternity, and what comes to one passes to all the rest. If we examine the mental condition of the world before this theory was impressed upon it, we shall find even advanced and liberal men taking views of the nature of things which now seem antiquarian. Take the pre-Darwinite rationalist; what did he believe? He did not believe the miracles of the Bible, nor modern superstitions; but the supernaturalist could easily press him into a corner by compelling him to admit that the world began by a miracle, that man began by a miracle, and that each star in the sky, each animal on earth, was formed from nothing by the creative fiat of the deity. The theist repeated as often as the orthodox the words—"God said, Let there

be light, and there was light ;" " God made man in his own image." Then the pre-Darwinite rationalist easily conceded that Milton's version was true,—and that the first man and woman sprang from the hand of God in all perfection of intelligence and beauty, and able to speak a perfect language. There were, of course, exceptions. Some did not believe in any God at all ; but the average rationalist of our memory, who still held to a God, thus conceived of him as an Almighty Mechanic and Contriver. Upon the moral world he looked with awe, seeing in it a chaos over which the principles—Good and Evil—perpetually struggled. His great problem was as to free will or necessity ; his hope, that by the divine will good would finally triumph over evil.

Then Darwinism came and gave every department of inquiry a new point of departure, and a new theorem. It was found that even the blind elements had shaped themselves in accordance with principles of adaptation to necessary circumstances ; that life had begun everywhere in the feeblest and lowest forms ; that the first man and woman were savages but little raised above the brute ; that there was no evidence whatever of any such Creation as was represented in the old belief in an original vacuum ; but, on the contrary, every probability that the substance of things had always existed and would exist. The philologists proved that language, instead of being a miraculous gift, had grown up like—perhaps out of—the cries of animals. In a word, the idea of a Mighty Mechanic, a Supreme Wonder-worker, was driven out of the conception of the rationalist.

V.

And what has thereby been lost? Nothing whatever, I contend, which could be of the slightest advantage to the religious nature of man, but much that hampered and misdirected it. For this conception of an arbitrary Creator involved the notion of a gigantic man,—a will like our own, though much more powerful. And this notion involved the darkest of problems—why this Omnipotent Maker did not make things better? Why did he create a world full of imperfections and bitter pains and evils? The orthodox could explain these evils by declaring all nature to be under a curse, but the rationalist was simply left in a cloud.

But does the doctrine of natural selection, then, expel God from the universe? Does it imply that in all these fair worlds, amid all this beauty, there is no intimation of a divine Being? By no means. It has simply broken up an old belief as to the relation of that Being to the universe. As theology had in the far past narrowed him to the seven-planet theory, or again fancied that the sun rose every morning because God waked it up, and declared in each case that God was driven from the universe whenever a law was substituted for his immediate action, so now we see the infirmity of mind which can see no God except as prisoned in its crude notion. Darwinism simply says to the human mind—Once more you have been found wrong in your speculations as to God's relation to this universe. Once more you are

proved unable to comprehend the Incomprehensible. Once more you are taught to abstain from dogmatising where you cannot know, and to learn humility !

But still, above our crumbled creeds and vanished speculations the ancient heavens declare a divine glory ; still day speaketh unto day, and night unto night showeth knowledge ; and man may still reverently raise his reason to contemplate order and beauty in the universe. Out of decay and death springs the flower with its breath of love, and over earthly ruin bends the tender sky. There is nothing whatever in this theory which veils to man a single expression of wisdom, or love shining through the mystery around him.

Nay, on the contrary, I will maintain that this theory has added fresh tints of love, brighter beams of reason to the universe by opening our eyes to new aspects of it. It has illuminated for the first time the dreary track of pain and wrong. The pre-Darwinite might say to the suffering, "I hope and trust your pain is for some good end ;" but the post-Darwinite can say with confidence, "I know and see that pain is a beneficent agent. Pain has been the spur under which the whole world has progressed. To escape danger, to survive pain, every form has gained its fleetness, its skill, its power : the hardships of nature gave man his arts to conquer it ; the cruel elements built his home ; and in the black ink of sin were written the laws of morality and civilisation."

And if this theory has for the first time taught man the sublime uses of evil, none the less has it harmonised nature with the laws of his reason. For in their best

statement the old pre-Darwinite views of nature made it discordant with the intellectual history of man. History shows us a continuous moral, mental, and religious development of humanity. The theories, the philosophies, the creeds of mankind have not been distinct and isolated creations ; they have been an unbroken series of religions, schools, ideas, each growing out of one preceding, giving birth to another, so that step by step we trace philosophy back from Huxley to Moses, or religion from Christendom to Assyria and India. This unbroken evolution of thought in human history we find repeated in the unfolding intellect of every individual being. We do not think one thing, and then a totally different thing, and feel that there is no link binding our days and our purposes together into a life that represents an individuality. Yet we had long been looking out into nature and seeing it as a set of distinct creations ; one form made, then another. We may well reverence the great men who have found in the universe one theme with endless variations. They have enabled us to hear a grand music such as Plato dreamed of as the harmony to which the planets moved. Finding now that his moral and intellectual history have in their development repeated in higher series the growth of the physical world that bore him, man takes his own brain as his standpoint, and from the summit of his own thought sees the immeasurable thought reflected in nature so far as his intelligence can reach.

Nor has the post-Darwinite world lost any rational hope held by the pre-Darwinite,—neither for the present or for the future. For rational men, emancipated from fables,

immortality has long been a high hope ; and a high hope it will remain, untouched by the fact of his birth out of the organic world. So far as that hope rested upon the dignity of the human being, it is increased by a theory which shows that for millions of ages the forms and forces of the world were all employed in preparing and working out the marvel of a human brain. He may well argue that nature will fitly cherish the gem which it cost æons to produce, and myriads of busy hands to polish.

And as to this world, the new theory has caused a hope to dawn over us so dazzling that our eyes can hardly yet bear it. It has revealed that the force which has built up from a zoophyte the wondrous frame of man, remains still in our hands, ready to lay hold on man himself and build him into a nobler race; to fossilize deformity and liberate every power; ready to apply the omnipotent universe for the culture of man and his dwelling-place, causing social deserts to rejoice and blossom like the rose.

VI.

The history of the world shows that the dreaded discoveries of one age become the cherished beliefs of another. Few men aroused more alarm by discoveries than Newton, yet few other men's names are now oftener uttered with reverence by theologians, and pulpits illustrate by his theories that divine existence they once seemed to imperil. But that is not a healthy moral condition of the world in which truth is always dealt with as an enemy when it first appears, and only treated as a

friend after he who discovered it is dead. That is very disheartening to the intellectual world. We shall never have the really great progress in knowledge so long as every youth sees that the prosaic world regards with wrath the messengers that bring tidings of newly-discovered laws and truths.

It is not at all certain that the fault of such a state of things rests exclusively with the world at large. There would seem to be a fault with the men of science also. It may be that it was the long ages of persecution which has driven science into a sort of scholarly hermitage, from which it sends out works so full of hard technical words derived from the dead tongues once made compulsory lest the people should understand them; and it may have been the old theological monopoly of the speculative moral and emotional realms of human interest which originally relegated the *savant* to that hard, unpoetical aspect of his facts from which he so rarely ventures, and even now, it must be admitted, only with risk of stern remand to the valley of dry bones. Whatever may be the reason, it is plain that for lack of more general "scientific use of the imagination," or other cause, some of the most important discoveries are still lingering in fragmentary isolation,—stones of stumbling, because left in the way instead of being fitted into the wall.

I was conversing with some gentlemen on the subject of evolution in its purely scientific aspects. A lady sat listening, and when the others had gone, she remarked to me, "It is a most horrible doctrine." I was startled by her look—there was on it pallor, and an expression of

mental suffering. "What is horrible?" I asked. "Why, that doctrine you have been all talking about—the survival of the strongest. It may be that it is the law of nature that the weak should be trampled out by the strong, but it is dreadful." Her eyes were filled with tears. I answered, "I believe in no such doctrine as the survival of the strongest,—nor do those scientific men believe in it. They believe in the survival of the fittest; but mere strength is not fitness. The survival of the strongest were indeed a horrible doctrine; but all nature is against it. Huge monstrous things that were only strong—moving mountains of force, mammoth and megalosaurus—have perished because they were merely strong, and so not fit to survive; the forms of cruelty and brute force have had to give way before things much weaker; the lions have decreased before the lambs; and man, weakest of all animals at birth, has been awarded the sceptre of the world because he was fittest through his power to love, to consider, to deny himself for others."

I had the happiness of witnessing the relief of that young heart when she discovered her mistake,—that the horrible doctrine of the reign of brute force has been especially crushed by that of evolution, which proves the steady triumph of the gentle forces of sympathy and justice. How much misunderstanding of this kind envelopes all great truths when they first ascend the horizon, so that human hearts tremble like the watching shepherds when they saw their star. "The glory of the Lord shone round about them, and they were sore afraid." 'Tis an old poem, but ever repeated.

It is the very evangel of our time that knowledge is shadowing out the moral essence of the world. It has shown mere physical power steadily decreasing, and the power of thought and love increasing, and it has thus discovered for the humane a new basis for their hope, a new spur for their effort. Ferocity is a weakness; fanaticism is feebleness; selfishness is suicidal: Turkey feels it; Spain feels it; Rome is learning it. Love, Justice, Knowledge, lead the world, and human hearts may now sing unto their Lord a new song!

VII.

A new song! and yet that which is now a matter of knowledge was of old felt out by the intuition and faith of great hearts. It was felt out by Christ, who estimated things by their sentiment—by their spirit—and not by their outward size and seeming strength. He anticipated the whole story of moral evolution. To the lowly, he said, is given the kingdom of heaven; humility shall inherit the earth. He had faith that ideas could level the loftiest temples stone by stone, and perfect faith move mountains. He could see a vast property in a widow's mite, and emptiness in the costliest offering. He valued the sympathy of a woman whom others scorned more than the gifts of the proud. A cup of cold water given for truth's sake carried with it a divine virtue. He looked not to the thing done, whether it were large or little, but to the heart and worth put into it: nothing could be large that had no soul in it, nothing could be small which had in it one

spark of love and truth. Is there no philosophy in all this? Why modern knowledge has almost abolished distinctions of great and small. It reads one law in the rounding of a world or a tear; it sees in the smallest improvement of plant or animal the essence of a new kingdom. It discovers the power of leasts.

It recalls us to consider the sages who did not hesitate to match their heart against the thrones of wrong and error, because they sought no ends of their own, but simply the ends of truth and right. None of those sages, none of their ages, stood in the presence of greater causes and truths than those amid which we now stand. There are phantasms of religious terror to be cleared away; there is knowledge that can save millions from disease and pain to be spread abroad; there are prejudices which dwarf little children by false training and instructions in error; there are others which make it almost impossible for women to train themselves for service to the world, or to enter upon any useful career. Talents are hid in ignorance, buried under prejudice. Very few are allowed to devote their gift to the task which needs them, as they need it. Fashion is denying thousands the work they would love, and uniting them to that they love not.

What can we do amid all these great moral necessities? So far as visible force is concerned it is perhaps but a widow's mite we can give, a cup of water, a little ointment; it may be we can bring no alabaster-box, but only the tear of sympathy to the sacred cause. Little are these in themselves, but what mean they? Whence have they come? Who can tell us how far has come, and out of

what depth, the humblest meed of sympathy or aid to a cause rejected of men? Out of what patience, and thought, after what temptations resisted! When all the world is smiting the unpopular cause, what is implied if one approaches with hand extended not to smite but to clasp and bless? Out of all, that one hand alone represents the divine life and purpose of nature; that one alone acts for no selfish end, is guided by no low interest; bribed by no mean desire, not terrified by public odium, that heart which brings its love and devotion to the true and right has brought with it the might of every law — the forces of destiny.

When Dr. Johnson was once loudly defending some strange principle of his against a company of gainsayers, all opposed him it seemed,—one man present alone said to him, “I believe you are right!” The man who said that was John Wesley. Johnson lowered his voice and said, “To have convinced such a man as you is all I can desire.” With the one best man on his side Johnson felt he was in the majority.

That is not weak which has won the faith of the wise, and the love of the pure in heart: though the wise be few and poor, and the lovers able to give but a cup of cold water, yet the cause so supported is not weak: its star is in the East, its day will not recede, it moves with steadfast planets in their courses.

VIII.

The whole tendency and evolution of the world has been to the end of unfolding in man a power to overcome all the selfishness of brute nature. Through ages, by self-seeking the animal has been formed; but now by self-denial the animal reaches a new birth. The impulse to love that which can give no recompense to the lower nature; the power to serve with unwearied devotion the true and right; these are the last and highest forces evolved from nature. They are the first signs of human freedom. For no man is free who is morally fettered by his interests, his fears, or his prejudices. He is a slave to the world. A man is free only when he is able to go against his interests, his fears, and his prejudices. "He is free whom the truth makes free"—the man whom nothing can swerve from that.

Religion—which should be an expression of this consummate force in nature—the power that frees man from low motives and makes his action flow straight from reason and conscience,—must itself be born again. That which is commonly called religion is not the loving service, but servility under threat and bribe,—and these the coarsest. So far the conventional religion is irreligious. There is a healthy fear—the fear of doing wrong. There is a noble hope—the hope that rectitude will bring benefit to all. But that is a base fear, a mean hope, which look merely to personal consequences of animal pain and pleasure. How wild is the unreason

that tries by the tremendous menace and promise of eternal anguish and bliss—the most powerful appeals to selfishness—to make men religious, that is unselfish, acting purely from motives of reason and right. That such a religion as this, which has been tried on human nature for ages, has failed, can be matter of surprise to no thinking man.

True, when it was really believed, its threats and bribes availed to conquer some of the ordinary outward effects of selfishness. It led monks and nuns to give up earthly for future gain. It made fanatics frown on human joys to secure celestial delights and escape future torment. For the Puritan it turned the face of nature to stone, like a Medusa, and blighted the sweetest flowers of life. Such men gave up much ; but the selfish character remained—nay, it was intensified. The type of character was also as self-righteous and cruel as it was joyless and narrow.

The old so-called religion having failed to produce the perfect love that casteth out fear, the man of perfect truth, whom no menace of deity or devil can turn from his rectitude,—where are we to look for the religion which can lead forth that culminating flower of nature, the perfect character? Only in the high fruition of a religion whose God is Love, to whom the highest service is love, whose law is not sacrifice, but mercifulness. It is a reasonable service, for that which falling on the heart is love, falling on the intellect is reason. It knows no hell but falsehood and wrong, it dreams of no heaven but an eternity of progressive thought and ever-growing harmony. Its power has been manifested in all time in the great lovers

and saviours of men, who have consecrated their lives to truth, right and humanity, though denounced to flames on earth and flames in hell. Every rational truth, we hold, has been planted in the earth and nourished with the tears of men who gave their service in purity of love and fidelity to truth. Every divine truth that is to us as a fragrant flower, is crimsoned with the blood of a brave man's heart. They who are free from all authority but truth, are the heirs of their faith and trustees of their example; on them mainly depends whether, in the coming time, the religion of love, reason and right shall more largely manifest its power to conquer selfishness, without terror, and stimulate to high action without any sealed contract for payment in Paradise. To be able to bear on their work, to add to it, and transmit in fuller force to the future, it is not necessary that a man or woman should be eminent, but only that what power they possess should be pure. If a man have within, firmly based, that character which is organised by truth and love, able to obey them and them only, every thought, word and deed of that man will further, though in ways he know not, all right and true things, and his feeble hand become part of the law that upholds the universe.

More than any Sufi does the believer in evolution feel himself walking through life on the perilous scimitar-edged bridge, *Al-Sirat*; between vast worlds of happiness and misery. On the one side the abyss of animalism, on the other the radiant realm where every aspiring power within him finds its fruition. How often will he turn upon himself and ask, am I yet a real man? Am I

acting from high or from low motives? Am I in anything acting from motives of pride, of prejudice, or with a view to mere personal ends? If so, how can I belong to that kingdom of pure truth and perfect rectitude, which is the high and fair religion that the ages have been building? If impelled by passion, how am I better than those lower orders whose natural life is passion? If acting selfishly, what am I but a higher form, perhaps therefore more dangerous, of the creature prowling for its prey? Why, anybody can do that! Any creature can be angry, and obstinate, and forget all but himself; nature abounds in horns and stings. It hasn't required a million ages merely to evolve that type of man that can stick to his wrong and injure others. But nature might well have laboured a myriad ages to produce a man who would rather be injured than injure another, and who is great enough when he is wrong to hold his pride underfoot, and say "I have been wrong." That is greatness.

It is, indeed, a high and steep ladder, that by which a man must climb out of his lower up to his higher nature; one slip towards the false, one backward fall, and he relapses in the scale of moral being, and adds his weight to all the baser forces of the earth. Love and truth alone can save and uplift us. Let none attempt to deny or evade the grave necessity. Moral evolution is not only true, it is a tremendous truth. He who shall realise it will in that instant fall upon his knees in the awful presence of conscience, and there make his solemn vow. To Truth he will appeal,—“Take me, fill me with thy pure spirit! If to thee I have been at any time disloyal, if I

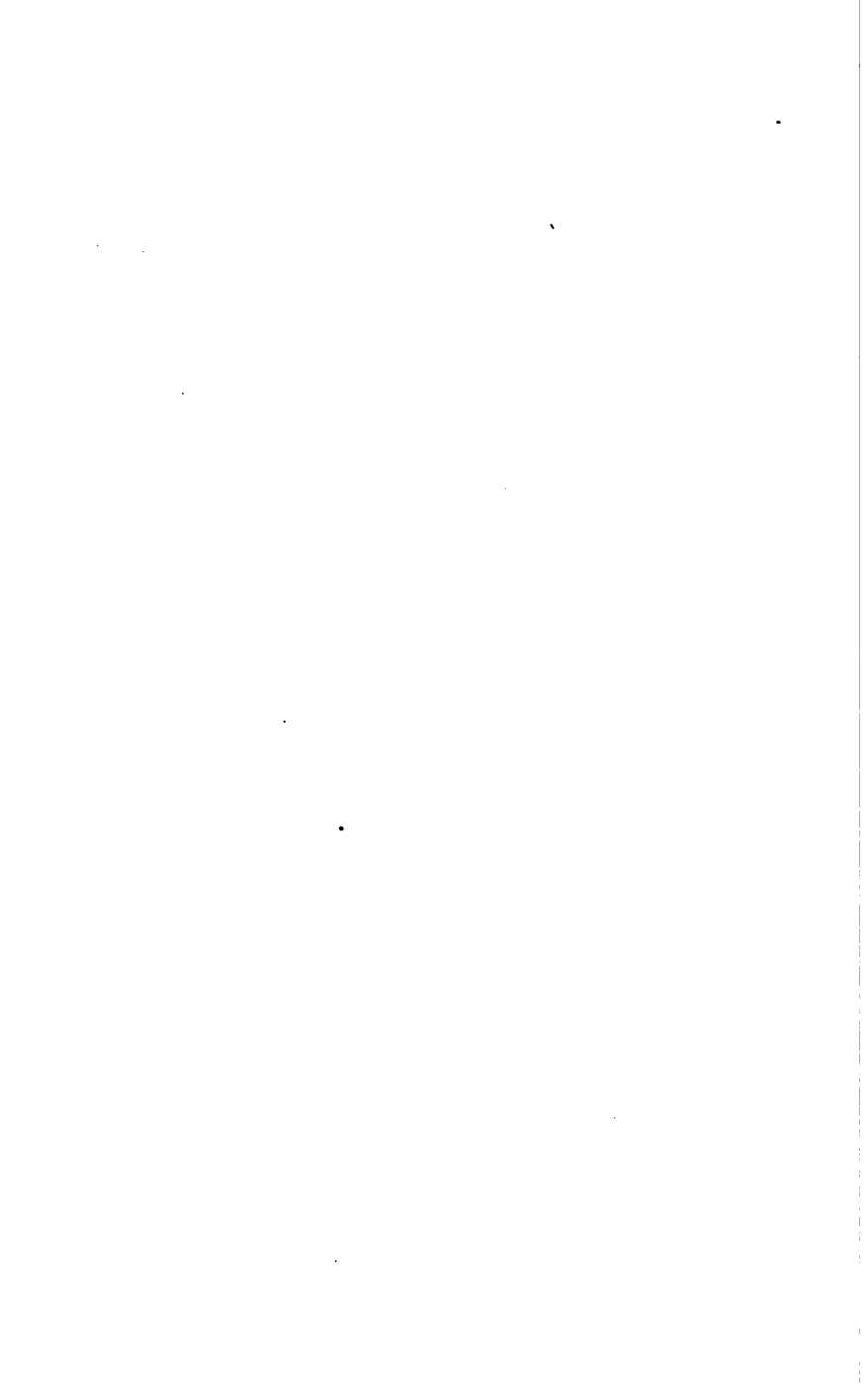
have fostered any conscious error, or practiced any mean concealment, or acted on considerations of mere expediency,—pardon me, thou one only light of mortals, and henceforth witness that I speak and live the simple truth ! And thou, spirit of Love, let me come to rest upon thy gentle breast ! If I have wandered from thee—have steeled my heart against my brother—forgotten charity—thought only of myself—forgive me, sweetest and best—pardon me, thou Love which alone can make life worth living,—and henceforth may my word and deed be not mine, but proceed from thy pure and perfect heart ! ”

Anew is the commandment given to us—If any will be great let him serve. Let him seek not to be ministered unto, but to minister. Let him turn his back on self and its low successes : let him trust himself absolutely to love that must prevail, and truth that cannot fail,—and then wherever he may stand, beside him stand the law and the majesty of God.



VI.

FOOTPRINTS OF THE GREAT.





FOOTPRINTS OF THE GREAT.

HARDLY any region of the world is without certain consecrated footprints, believed to have been left by some great religious teacher ; over them temples are built, and around them pious offerings are suspended. In one place it is the footprint of Indra, in another of Krishna, in another of Buddha, and there is a famous footprint of Vishnu in Kashmir. On the summit of what is called Adam's Peak in Ceylon, there is a footprint to which all sects lay claim,—Buddhists calling it Buddha's ; Sivaïtes, Siva's ; Mahommetans, Adam's ; Christians, St. Thomas's. This is the Sri-pada, or "beautiful footstep,"—a natural formation with but a faint resemblance to a footstep. Suggested by this, perhaps is the Phrabat (holy footprint) of Siam, which is artificial but very ancient, is five feet long by two broad, and on which has been carved nearly every symbol of oriental religion. It is the reputed footstep of Buddha, who is believed by his worshippers to have had all these sacred emblems upon his blessed feet. This footprint was a sacred thing before the Christian era (the toe of it

was kissed by pilgrims 1,000 years before the Pope's). There are the artificial footprints on Mount Olivet, said to have been left by Christ as he ascended. Near Rome, in the Church of San Sebastiano outside the city, I saw in marble alleged footprints of Christ. Jesus is said to have appeared to Peter, who said "Lord, whither goest thou?" and Jesus answered, "To Rome, to be crucified afresh!" The two prints of bare feet are generally surrounded by worshippers. At Poitiers in France there are two footprints of Christ in the Church of St. Radigonde, made when he appeared to her there to inform her of her coming martyrdom. There are even so-called footprints of Jesus in the Mosque of Omar; though among Mahommetans the most sacred footprints are on a stone in the temple of Mecca, said to be those of Ishmael, though others ascribe them to Abraham.

Now, while the superstition of sacred footprints may be traced from the East borne to us by Christian legend, we can track them in purely pagan survival, as they came by Indo-Germanic migration. In many parts of Germany there are formations, somewhat footshaped, which are attributed to demons, or giants, or sometimes to heroes. There are two immense natural hollows of this kind in the Hartz mountains, near the village of Magdesprung, where a giantess leaped down from the clouds to save one of her maidens from danger, and left these two footprints 200 feet apart. But it is in the corresponding folklore of England that we find the oriental accent of these stories. In this country we rarely find stones of a similar character called "footprints;" though the footprint

on rock in the isle of Thanet was once very famous. Where St. Augustine first stepped ashore, when he came bringing the Christian religion to England, the rock was said to have received the mark of his foot like wax; and, said old Fuller, "the Romanists will cry shame on our hard hearts if our obstinate unbelief, more stubborn than stone, will not as pliantly receive the impression of this miracle." But in this country there are many curious hollowed or round stones which are called the devil's quoits. There is one I have seen in Dorset, which the devil pitched from the Portland rocks to Abbotsbury. Another huge stone in Scotland is said to have been pitched there from the distant highlands by Robert Bruce. But that such stones should be called quoits connects them with a long line of myths about the quoit hurled by mighty heroes, at the end of which line we come to the footstep of Buddha in Siam in the centre of which is the sacred quoit, or Chakkra, now adored above all things by Buddhists as symbol of the Law. Crossing the ocean you may find on a rock beside the sea in New England the large hollow called the Devil's Footstep. The pilgrims escaped bishops, but the devil followed them; and so it is that what began in the East as the track of a descended god, ends on the other hemisphere as the footstep of the devil.

But if you pass a few hundred miles into the interior of America you leave behind the last step of the Eastern superstition only to come upon its origin—in nature. In the farthest Alleghanies there is a mountain cleft

from summit to base, 1,300 feet, by a tributary of the Ohio river; and on the brow of that gorge a huge rock which the early red men carved all over with signs. The Indians call it the Cows' Rock: on it are graven the feet of all manner of beasts and birds, and human feet, and waving serpents, and many other forms. And what was this rock? Almost certainly it was an aboriginal newspaper. There the savage carved for others to recognise the token of what herd he had found, the direction his steps had taken, the danger to be avoided—whether the serpent or the special track of some hostile tribe—marked in gigantic size. The Indians were long since driven away from that region; but, had they been left there, those tracks might even now—their original use being lost—be worshipped as the footprints of invisible beings or legendary heroes.

Peter Lesley, the American geologist, helps us to put ourselves in the place of those primitive men. The wild pioneer swims the stream and rests upon the rock beyond. The wet mark of his foot is beside him, just the thing to tell the wanderers who follow with women and children the point where he landed. The wet footprint would soon vanish, but with his rude flint he carves it in simple lithograph, and there it remains. Or, possibly, he may do this for amusement, while he waits for others to approach. If afterward a settlement springs up there the use of the track will have ceased, its origin and meaning will be forgotten; and wherever real meaning is lost superstition will always be ready to supply one of its own. So the footstep is attributed to god or demon.

When the notion had gained popularity in one spot it would be copied. There is no patent right in fables. If the earth retained the footstep of Indra, it will not do for it to be less plastic for Buddha, for Abraham, or Christ, as their several sects arise. And then each religion will try to make its founder's footprint a little larger than that of the rival, until they outgrow belief, and then they become more natural and realistic, as in the case of the tracks of Christ. Or a higher age arrives which discovers that a great man cannot be measured by the size of his foot.

Then we reach a phase of progress when the footstep becomes allegorical. The Hindoo god of destruction was believed to have two chief forms—the deadly lightning and the deadly serpent. The cobra snake is adored through fear as his incarnation. But it was told there was a saviour who could bruise that serpent's head. Vishnu descended, and his first step on earth brought his heel on the cobra's head, where the Vishnite sees the print of it on every cobra's head to this day. But straightway the idea floats away into Syria. There, too, we hear of a serpent incarnation of evil, and of an incarnate saviour whose heel is set upon his head, as it is now pictured in scores of Christian churches throughout the world. Thence come, too, the race of dragon-slaying heroes from Apollo to St. George. No doubt they all came from the first brave man who taught and showed his fellows that courage and skill could control and vanquish the destructive forces of the world. His footprint is carved on the world for as definite a utility as that which copied the track of the savage, and it signals the

march of the higher man through the wilderness of ignorance and fear.

But here, again, the origin and use, will pass away ; the significance will be sunk in the symbol. With what pain would Buddha or Christ, who taught so earnestly the simplicity and pure spirituality of moral life, could they return, behold men and women kneeling around their alleged visible footprints? Yet even there amid the darkness hearts have learned to invest with deeper meaning the footprints of the great. It may have been from beside one of them that there rose the chant of the Tamil poet, Pattanathu :—

In my heart I place the feet,
The golden feet of God.
Within, beyond man's highest word
My God existeth still :
In sacred books, in darkest night,
In deepest, bluest sky,
In those who know the truth, and in
The faithful few on earth.

And after all we need not bear hard upon the symbol. If we interpreted alien religions as their believers wish them interpreted, we should find that every such external footprint is countersigned by a footprint within. There are many hundreds of them in the world, but each marks where a real man has trod. The impress of a life preceded each impress on the rock. The great man passed there and the earth felt him,—never lost the trace and imprint of him. Where he first passed is now a highway. Un-counted millions of feet have made the high road. But among them all, and above them, will be distinguished

the footstep, brave and firm, of him who trod there when it was dangerous jungle or jagged rock, and whose steps were marked with his blood. Such were the great fore-runners of thought, of knowledge and virtue. They broke a path for man through the wilds of error, the ferocities of wrong. They manfully pressed on—aye, every one of them whose symbolic footprint is honoured this day—with undaunted faith on ways where poverty and grief were their gaunt companions, where terror, crucifixion, death took their toll at the end. Millions have since walked the same path in safety and happiness. The path of flint and thorn, where trod the martyr's bleeding feet, becomes at last a fair street of the Beautiful City. But out of all the footsteps that have beaten the highways of humanity, we select those early ones—so tried, so true—not ashamed to clasp, to kiss the blessed feet that were pierced in leading the way to our freedom and our joy. I will fain hope that around the visible footprints hover the solemn influences of those of whom they are memorials. I will trust that deep in the hearts of those who climb on their knees that stairway at Rome by which they believe a great and true man descended from a judgment-seat of power to his death,—there is some love and reverence, and a struggling onward to what little beam of light may so mingle with the darkness of their dungeon. There is always a germ of nobleness in the mind that has reverence; and though that germ can never spring to flower and fruit if bound in the shell of formalism, it is something that it is there; springtide is searching for it.

At any rate, if we have lost sight of these external symbolic footprints, it were little gain if we did not all the more realise the moral impress which a great soul leaves upon the world, and upon every true heart in the world. How many people around us who adore the outward ancient footprint of Christ—his cross it may be, or his pierced hands and feet—are able to recognise his living footsteps, felt in their daily history? More alive is he to-day than many we meet on the street. Who hears his footfall as he moves invisibly through the world, and burns through its hard forms with the fiery passion of a heart in pain to seek and save men? Hark! Do you know that voice of righteous wrath against those who count their gains, or weigh their party schemes, while men are perishing, that cry of anguish from a soul which feels the suffering of men and women he never saw, as if they were his own children? When perfunctory first lords fail, there are First Lords of the Treasury of a nation's heart who start forth and issue commands that must and will be obeyed. The footprints of the saviours of men in all time are the hearts that are saving men now. They that left kings' courts for wildernesses, and they who perished between the altar and the temple, he who drank hemlock and he that was crucified, they are all moving on with every true man; they have moulded his brain, transfused his every vein with their blood, and through him still carry on their work of mercy and justice.

It is a proverbial saying in the East that the footprints of prophets can never be covered by any pavement. No conventional customs, no decorous routine, be it laid

with marble or with gold, can hide those footprints of the great which have sunk deep into human souls. And if our own hearts are worth anything, they will be footprints of those same saviours. Any other Buddhism, any other Christianity than this is mere worship of fictitious footprints in mouldy stone ; not totally worthless perhaps, but quite fruitless of real benefit to ourselves or others. But let us know that no true step or stand of a true man—however lowly or limited his lot—ever yet failed to leave a lasting impress on this earth. Indistinguishable it may be amid the multitude that press along the pathways, they still do their part to make those pathways wider and firmer. Happy indeed shall they be if to them fall the high privilege of leading the way to regions not yet trodden by the many ! Happy if theirs be the splendid opportunity of advancing where reason and rectitude point, even though the people warn of danger and refuse to follow, and resist ! It is sometimes good to serve mankind as they desire ; it is great to serve them in ways they like not, ways unpopular and unrewarded. Even so did the saviours and prophets who were before us ; and great is their reward. What is greater than to be numbered with those who extended the boundaries of human freedom and thought, who enlarged the hope and the vision of mankind ? If we could but so advance the world but by an inch—a hair's-breath—that hair's-breath were worth to us more than all the wealth and honours that crown any other earthly success. And that high possibility of influence is not far from any one of us. Unattainable by any force of personal ambition or self-

centred aim whatever, it is open to all who can see how self-devotion and pure principle can make the smallest things sublime. He need not envy any lot, however seeming high and happy, who knows the secret of living and working where he is, in accord with his own highest standard. The universal law of gravitation is just as much present where a pebble rolls as where a world moves ; and every life obedient to right, ruled by justice and by love, is caught up into the great order and borne on to ends higher than its happiest dreams.

For Nature and Events will generally shape our ends better than we can do it ourselves. It is far better to live by principle than by plan. I sometimes marvel, reading the lives of men who made epochs, how little they knew of the kind of service they were doing the world. There was simple-hearted John Wesley, who to his dying day thought himself a Church clergyman and wore his gown. He too has left his footprints deep. John Wesley once went to the little town of Epworth where he was born, hoping to preach in the parish church where from his own father's lips he had learned what the Church preached, but he meant to practise. When he arrived at the church door he found it barred against him. Followed by the crowd he went out into the graveyard, and taking his father's tombstone for a pulpit uttered there the prophecy which the Church refused to hear. He departed, but to this day the people of Epworth will show you on that grave-stone marks of the feet of John Wesley. Those little hollows represent nearly all that many of his own followers, as well as of the Church, can see of the great and

good man ; a dent in the old Church, a superstition in the new. But the revolution which Wesley wrought, and one that can never go backward, is what neither he nor they appreciated,—he showed that a better life could be built up outside the church than in it. He proved that the forces of virtue, of character, love, moral beauty, were out there in the churchyard ; the church could bar them out, but not bar them in—no more than it could imprison the sunshine. So unconsciously Wesley broke the church charm forever, and liberation has gone on ever since. That is a thing no man could plan. But if we will get the real footprint of Wesley, and not the fancied one at Epworth, it will be in like him building up the very best lives and characters outside the proud pale of superstition. The heaviest blow man or woman can strike at dogma is to render a better life than dogma can produce. When Romanism fell in England it was because the best heart and head were doing such work outside of it that its rites became paltry ; and when protestant superstition dies it will be for the same reason. So every honest, true life that is lived apart from those fables and creeds is setting upon the human heart another sign and seal of liberation.

Ah yes, my friend, it is yours too to make on earth the footprint of a man. The timid shall see it and gain courage. They shall say—"See, there stood, there moved a man—a real man. He bowed to no idols, abased his soul to no prejudices, yet was he humble ; he was not restrained by fear, and yet he was restrained ; he was no Christian, but what Christian was more faithful

and self-sacrificing?" That is the footprint to make. Time will not efface it ; nature will adopt it.

In our childhood we have pored over the story of that footprint which Crusoe found in the sand. It filled him with terror. Seeing none to make it he fancied it a demon's track. If a man's, it was that of one larger than himself. He built him a stronghold for defence. The tide came up and effaced the footstep. The man who made it was found, and effaced the terror. What remained to Crusoe from the footprint was a better house, a new friend, a larger experience. And so shall the visible footprints of great and small be obliterated by time and tide ; but yet invisibly shall such as are true remain for ever. The name of him who made it may be remembered no more, but the service he did shall abide. The terror awakened by the bold step for truth shall pass away, the dreaded innovation turn to a friend. Firm and fearless then, let us move on ; let every step of thought or work be based on truth, friendship, justice ; so shall we leave footsteps on the sands of time—

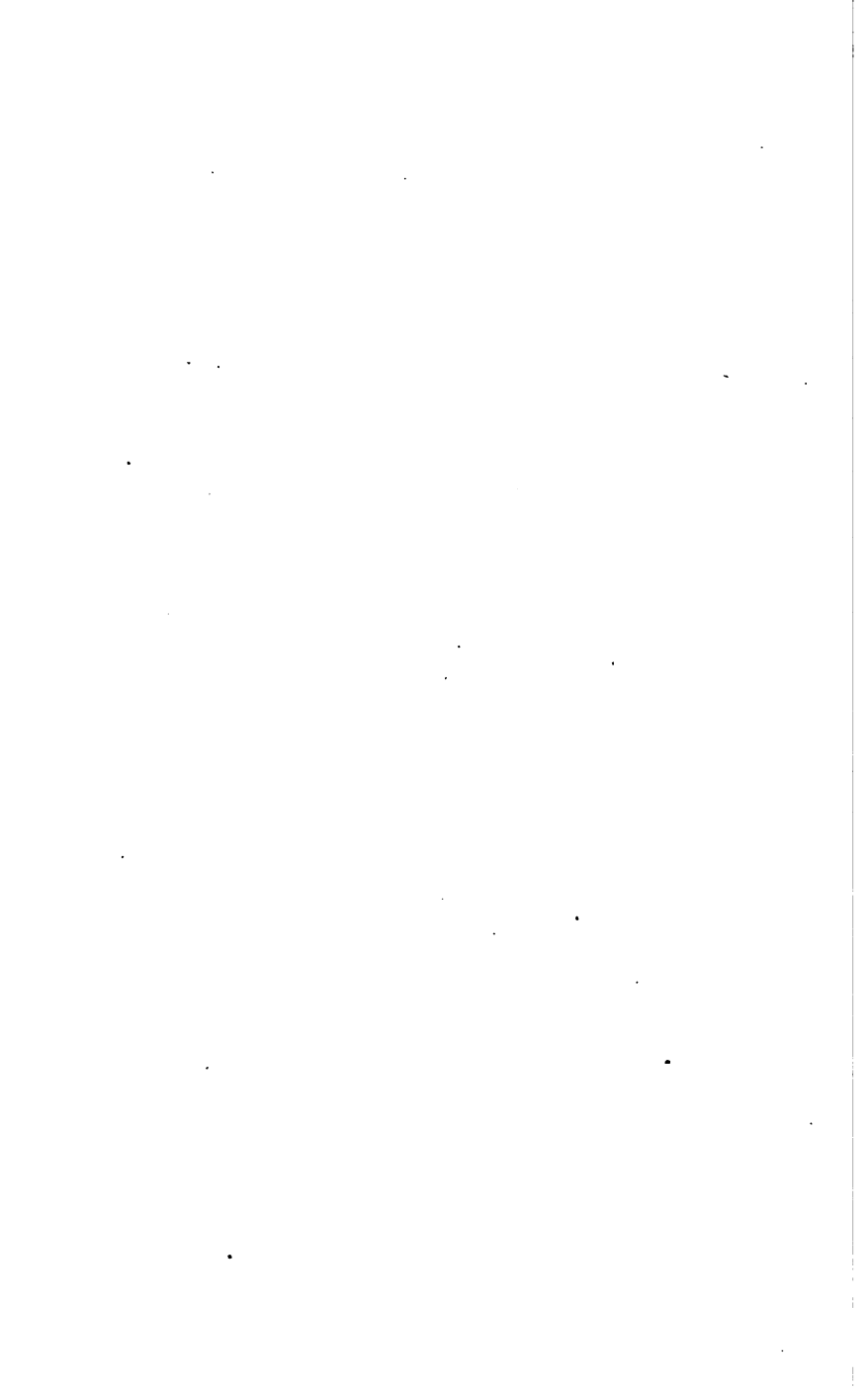
Footsteps that perhaps another
Sailing o'er life's solemn main,
A forlorn and shipwrecked brother
Seeing, shall take heart again.



VII.

ANTHROPOMORPHISM.

(1876.)





ANTHROPOMORPHISM.

(1876.)

Father of All, in every age.
In every clime adored,
By saint, by savage, and by sage—
Jehovah, Jove, or Lord!

T is a fair sign of our time that Pope's brave verses, of which the above is one, have become a favourite hymn in many liberal societies. They represent that dawning catholicity with which ascends the best and brightest hope of the world—the Religion of Humanity. May the tongues that sing it multiply, and the burden of it swell and roll onward, till nations hear it from afar and begin the chorus which shall celebrate the falling of the last wall imprisoning the hearts of men, and dividing the moral forces which, united, can conquer every evil of the world!

That "Jehovah, Jove, or Lord" should run together so smoothly in a verse, and cause no discord in a musical theme, is one more sign of the extent to which the religious sentiment has been able to conquer the ancient watch-words of war, and blend them into its own divine

harmonies. For those three names of deities, and many more that might be added to them, historically represent past and separate continents of thought and belief. It is a popular fallacy that the various deities of races were evoked purely by the religious sentiment, and originally represented its conceptions and emotions. Really those names were the crude generalisations of a primitive Science. They were names for natural forces and phenomena which gradually acquired personification as causal or ruling powers. They were next caught up by Philosophy and made centres of cosmogonies devised by the speculative mind. Dreaded at first, no doubt, by superstitious feeling as much as Evolution now, they gradually took their place in human belief, and religious sentiment grew around them,—even as in later times it has grown around, and may yet turn into dogmas, the once denounced theories of Newton. Widely different from each other were the ethnical dreams which deified the phenomena of nature, and equally different the philosophical schools that adopted them as their various bases: the religious sentiment, though essentially the same throughout the world, took the several shapes of the cosmogonies around which they grew, and their antagonisms are due to their non-religious accidents,—namely to their personifications, now known as deities.

The God in which most of us have been taught to believe was at first the name, afterwards the personification, of a group of natural phenomena; then it became the figure-head of an ancient cosmogony; and thence it was translated into a related theological system. Being the

most important factor of that theological system, it has naturally survived the crumbling of the rest of the system ; but, however strong it may be, if that God be really a survival, one fragment of a system whose other parts have become discredited, its own disappearance is only a question of time.

The world has had a long experience in this matter. In the theology of our Hindoo ancestors there is intimation of a supreme deity anterior even to Brahm, but now Brahm himself has been so superseded that he is at most an honorary deity. Scholars have often remarked on the fact that there exists no temple to Brahm, but they have not so generally noted the parallel fact that there is no Christian Church specially dedicated to God, none to Jehovah, none, I believe, even to the Father. The later deities supersede the old.

A friend of mine residing in a French town told me this story. The festival of the Sacrament is called there the *Fête de Dieu*—the Feast of God (our Corpus Christi). My friend having asked a sempstress if she could come and work on that day, the woman replied, “ Ah no ; it is the Feast of God, and he ought to have one day in the year for himself, poor dear ! ” We have in that compassionate “ poor dear ! ” the probable explanation of the absence of any temple either in India or Europe named for the first person in the Trinity of either.

Each of them was an original tribal deity. He reflected the local environment, the ideas, the particular hopes of a people. Political changes, migrations, the union of provinces, bring together such tribal deities. They come

to a compromise sharing an equal dignity ; so forming a triad, a trinity, an Olympian circle, of which each individual can be traced back to its provincial origin. But real equality is as impossible among gods as among races. The earlier, the more barbarian deity, representing a less advanced race, may preserve the most ancient and honoured title ; but the growing, the more modern world, will be represented by deities more adapted to new ideas and circumstances. This newer form may, indeed, be at first a mediator between the old and the new, an adapter, an intercessor, but he—or she—will gradually supersede the original deity. So Vishnu and Siva superseded Brahm ; Zeus superseded Saturn, and Bacchus, Zeus ; Thor superseded Odin ; the Father superseded Jehovah, Jesus the Father, and in some countries Mary has almost superseded Jesus. And all this despite the utmost efforts of each tribe or race to modify and adapt its deity to the new circumstances and improved ideas.

The difficulty that proved fatal to their god in each case was precisely the difficulty which besets the like efforts now. Their god was born out of a certain set of circumstances, reflected a system of beliefs ; when these crumbled away he survived, but could not survive for ever. The system of belief was the habitat of its god whose limits he could not overpass. Like Tithonos who received the gift of immortality, the primitive god received not the gift of perpetual youth : Tithonos, shrivelled with age, was at last compassionately changed to a grasshopper ; and of many ancient deities all we now hear is a tithonic chirp.

The growth, maturity, old age, and dotage of the ancient gods represents the opening and closing of one great epoch of anthropomorphism,—an epoch in whose deities were reflected not only the passions and powers of men, but even, to a large extent, their physical conformation. Even after they ceased to be thought of as occasionally visible, the beautiful brow of one, the eyes of another the hair of a third, were pictured in poetry and art.

II.

But the world entered on an age of philosophy. Thought set itself to the task of comprehending and explaining the universe, and generalising its phenomena to an order for the intellect. This new age expressed itself in a theism which selected from the previous theisms so much as seemed to be required to account for the origin and existence of Nature. It ended, of course, in negation. Lucretius saw its weakness as clearly as Tyndall. It lay in the assumption that there had been a creation. Nobody had any right to assume that there ever was a period when nothing existed. And even if that were granted the demand for a cause was interminable: each cause when reached requiring reference to a further cause, *ad infinitum*.

The deity first called up by the vain effort to reach a final cause for the universe was an anthropomorphic deity. That is, it was based upon the notion of an immense exertion of power of the kind that man puts forth in a small way, whenever he produces anything. Nor was the

First Cause less anthropomorphic, or manlike, if it were said that the universe was begotten by God or emanated from him. These also were human analogies.

Then arose the philosophical theism which based itself upon contrivance in nature, the evidences of intelligence and skill. This indeed underlay the earliest theism, but it was then able to command belief, because there was not yet that craving for unity which is the soul of philosophy. Nature is so full of apparent contradictions that various contrivers had to be imagined, and that was easy to the polytheists ; but philosophy rebelling against the idea of a swarm of deities with contrarious powers and aims was soon puzzled to reconcile good and evil designs. There is a story of a clergyman who, walking with his son, pointed out the goodness and wisdom of God as illustrated in a crane wading near them, the soft folding and unfolding of its long legs without causing a ripple to startle the fish, and its long slender bill so admirably shaped for fishing. The lad recognised the goodness of God to the crane ; " but, father," he said, " isn't the arrangement a little tough on the fish ? " The clergyman told his son that his difficulty was a suggestion of the devil. In one sense it certainly was : the mental growth of a child repeats in an embryonic way the mental history of the race, and it was precisely in that boy's difficulty that the notion of a devil was born. The crane side of the proceeding showed the good contriver, the fish side the bad contriver. The presence of pain in the world was fatal to the argument from design : if it proved any deity at all it proved two at least. And there it has logically ended

in the great theologies of the world, while, on the other hand, Science and Philosophy abandon the problem altogether as relating to supposed matters for whose verification the human mind has no corresponding faculties.

So perished the anthropomorphic deities of philosophy,—the first-cause god, the contriving god,—following their Olympian predecessors.

III.

Monotheism, in a strict sense, has never been the creed of any popular or historical religion. The reduction of supernatural powers to subordination under three persons, whose several tasks imply the duality of god and devil, has simplified the problem of theism but has not materially advanced it towards solution. So far as this is concerned we are very much in the same position as were the rationalists under whose scepticism the gods and goddesses of Greece vanished eighteen hundred years ago, when the popular divinities, like those of our own time, could only be defended by denunciations of those who denied them.

In *Fraser's Magazine* (October, 1876), Mr. James Anthony Froude has written an admirable paper on Lucian, in whose works he finds reflected "The Twilight of the Gods" of Paganism, which is a mirror wherein most of our nineteenth century theology may behold its own features. Lucian was born near Antioch and wrote in the latter part of the second century after Christ. He

looked upon the decaying superstitions of the Greek and Roman pantheon, and the growing superstitions of Christians, pretty much as our philosophic thinkers now look upon the dogmas of orthodoxy on the one hand, and the theories of spiritualism on the other. In his *Zeus tragedy* the scene opens in heaven, where the deities, finding their chief, Zeus, in grief and agitation, question him as to the cause. Zeus relates sadly that he had been listening to a controversy in Athens between two disputants, Damis the Epicurean, and Timocles the Stoic, before a large and distinguished audience, on the nature of Providence. Damis affirmed that the gods had no existence, or at any rate no influence on human affairs: and though Timocles pleaded for the gods furiously, Zeus declared his arguments were weak, the listeners generally on the side of Damis, and, unless something were done, they (the gods) would become mere names and their altars ruins.

Upon these grave tidings the deities hold solemn conclave, and among others who give their opinion is Momus, who frankly avows that he cannot blame the philosophers who pick holes in them. "What other conclusions could they arrive at," he asks, "when they saw the confusion around them? Good men neglected, perishing in penury or slavery; and profligate wretches wealthy, honoured, and powerful. Let us be candid. All that we have really cared for has been a steady altar-service. All else has been left to chance. And now men are opening their eyes. They perceive that whether they pray or don't pray, go to church or don't go to church,

makes no difference to them." Momus is rebuked for his rudeness, but the question remains, what is to be done? In the end they all repair to the place where Damis and Timocles have engaged to renew their contest. As they arrive, their advocate Timocles says to Damis—

What! you blasphemous villain, you! you don't believe in the gods and in Providence?

Damis.—I neither believe nor disbelieve. I wait your reasons why I should have a positive opinion about it.

Timocles.—I will give you no reasons, you wretch! Give me your's for your atheism.

Zeus.—Our man is doing well. He has the rudest manner and the loudest voice. Well done, Timocles! give him hard words. That is your strong point. Begin to reason and you will be as dumb as a fish.

But the advocate of the gods is presently compelled to give his reasons. He argues from design and order in nature, but Damis tells him he assumes design and order where there may be none. Timocles next says he believes in the gods because Homer did. Damis wants to know whether he also believes as Homer relates, that Zeus, to reward Thetis, cheated Agamemnon with a false dream, which led to the destruction of tens of thousands. Timocles then appeals to the common belief of mankind; but Damis reminds him that one tribe worships a bull, another a crocodile, a third a dog-headed ape, and asks if these are the foundations of theology. Finally, Timocles argues that as there are altars there must be gods. Whereupon Damis laughs and says that they can contend

no longer, since he hangs the existence of gods on the existence of altars. "You have taken refuge at the altar as men do in extremities."

Timocles.—Oh, oh! you are sarcastic, are you! you gravedigger! you wretch! you abomination! you gaol-bird! you cesspool! we know where you come from; your mother was a whore; and you killed your brother and seduced your friend's wife; you are an adulterer, a Sodomite, a glutton and a beast. Stay till I can thrash you. Stay, I say, villain, abhorred villain!

Zeus.—One has gone off laughing, and the other follows railing and throwing tiles at him. Well, what are we to do?

Hermes.—The old play says, "You are not hurt if you don't acknowledge it." Suppose a few people have gone away believing in Damis, what then? A great many more believe the reverse; the whole mass of ignorant Greeks and the barbarians everywhere.

Zeus.—True, Hermes, but that was a good thing which Darius said about Zopyrus, "I had rather have one Zopyrus than a thousand Babylons."

In this ancient fragment we find all the arguments for the existence of a deity stated with which we are familiar,—design, authority of the ancients, authority of great men, the common beliefs of mankind. And when all these are met and refuted as they have been in our day by the precise arguments of Damis, we are unhappily still familiar with the final argument—taking refuge at the altar and hurling epithets and slanders against the man who denies its authority over reason. How was Voltaire answered?

Accused of vices. How was Thomas Paine answered? Charged with all manner of wickednesses. Have our theologians got any better argument to-day? In some enlightened centres those who disbelieve the popular idols may escape slander and abuse if they keep well to their own audiences, or write in a high philosophical way that does not reach the masses; but if they come into the popular arena the argument is still apt to end as it has against Mr. Bradlaugh, who has had to defend himself several times in the courts against the personal charges heaped upon him, and of which he has proved himself innocent,—slanders like those against Damis, resorted to in lieu of any real arguments to prove the existence of the traditional and conventional deities.

But all such wrath directed against a man in reply to honestly-reasoned convictions are signs and confessions of a dying or dead belief. Personalities never rise till arguments fail. Thinking men who have listened to the denunciations heaped upon such men as Tyndall can only echo the thought attributed to Zeus when Hermes would console him by the reflection that the great ignorant mass still believed in him though Damis did not: "I had rather have one Zopyrus than ten thousand Babylons." It would be worth more to the religion of England to possess the confidence of one Tyndall than that of ten thousand ignorant believers, and the retained advocates interested to foster their blindness and encourage their superstition.

IV.

As philosophy surrenders the problem of the divine existence, religious sentiment has taken it up. What we have for some years been calling "pure theism" was the first result. It accepted the verdict of philosophy in large part; that is, it met the problem of pain and evil in the world by pronouncing the word "unknown," if not "unknowable." But on the other hand it eagerly seized on all the beauty and joy of the world, and recognised in these the presence of wisdom and love. Its very heart was optimism. It said, so far as we know all is well; when we know more of what now seems evil, no doubt we shall find that to be also good. It was not the necessity of this moral theism to affirm a beginning of the universe, nor a creator or great heavenly mechanic; all it wanted was a moral being, a sacred living ideal to be loved and adored. This marks an enormous distance of our present theism from any theology of the past. In all history we do not find an instance where any one has been persecuted for attributing wickedness to any god or gods. Tens of thousands have suffered for denying their existence, or for novel definitions concerning their form, essence, and mode of existence; but the gods have been freely associated with every baseness, from murder and lust to jealousy and wrath, and no one was ever troubled for holding such opinions about them. Perhaps it would be too much to say our modern theism has entirely reversed this, for it is to be feared that

many theists would even yet fraternise with a clergyman who believes God capable of torturing human beings in hell, rather than with a man who denies God's existence. But though, for a time yet, the atheist may hardly fare so well among theists as the Calvinist, the tendency is to give up even so much anthropomorphism as lies in that feeling. It is not difficult to perceive that any god who personally cares what men think of him, or who is concerned whether his existence is believed in or not by mortals, is only a man,—and rather a narrow-minded man too; for a sensible man would hardly feel insulted if he heard that some one doubted his existence. A deity personally interested in such things belongs to a theology whose tomb he must ultimately share. At the same time it is perfectly consistent for one to oppose atheism as an evil without fancying it a sin. We may regard it as injurious to man without dreaming that it is an offence either to man or God.

V.

The ascription of personality to the deity also represents a lingering anthropomorphism: to what degree, depends upon the exactness or vagueness with which the term "personality" is conceived. Of course man can not have an idea of any personality but his own, however this may be idealised. All modern theists divest this personality of its coarser attributes, when ascribing it to a deity. Nay, even barbarians have not called any god by a personal name. The names of ancient gods are those of the elements, the day, the sun, time, the sky, or space; and no

tribe seems to be so low as to give personal names to their gods—as it might be William or Henry. But individual names are symbols of personal interests ; it seems of the very essence of our personality that we should have a private history distinguishing us from all others. No theist can think of the deity as personal in that way,—as having a pedigree and private interests, concerns separate from the universe. Doubtless the vast majority of educated theists have eliminated these main elements of a human personality, and have taken its higher manifestations as attributes of the deity,—Power, Will, Intelligence, Consciousness, Love. Now these things are, in their obvious sense, known to us only as qualities of man, and as reflecting the limitations of man. We can conceive of power and will only as overcoming resistance, and to personify them in a good god implies the recognition of a power opposing him. Intelligence is the perpetual contrivance of an imperfect being to adapt itself to its environment. Consciousness is the result of an apparatus connecting a limited nature through senses with external objects, and possible only under changes in the relation to those objects. (We are not conscious of the weight of the atmosphere, vast as it is, because it is unchanging, nor of the motion of our earth, swift as it is : we become conscious of a thing by comparing it with a different thing, as if the earth's motion should cease we would become conscious of it by comparison of its stillness with the previous motion.) If we attribute such sensations to God we invest him with our own imperfections : his consciousness, for instance, would mean that he becomes

aware of something he did not know before. Shall we say "God loves us?" Love, in that sense, is a human attribute: it represents the longing of a limited nature for something it lacks; or the cleaving to another needed for its own completeness.

These facts confirm the words of Spinoza: "To define God is to deny him." Every personification of the deity is an attempt to define him. It has been tried through many thousands of years, and with one result. The personification of one age represents the highest conception of that age, but becomes a low conception to following ages. If the loyalty of that earlier age had gathered about an impersonal ideal, that ideal might grow with the intellectual and moral growth of the world. But when the ideal is personified, popular loyalty is divided between the moral quality and the person: the personality inspires awe and fear—which the abstract ideal does not—and he continues to receive allegiance after his character represents only a discredited ideal. Many a kind woman and just man now worships a being neither just nor kind, an image inferior to themselves. Their loyalty is divided between the moral ideal alone worthy of worship, and an ancient personification of what once seemed moral but is now immoral,—simply because that personification was girt about with will, power, self-esteem and other menacing characteristics essential to personality.

Have we reason to hope more for our own personifications? Can we be sure that any personality imagined to-day will give our descendents less trouble than Jehovah has given us? Will it not bind the growing ideal if in the

future great institutions, churches, property are under tenure of the Theos of our present theism, who will so be enabled to fortify himself against the more enlightened views of our own liberal brothers and sisters of the future ? It was the old argument of Liberalism that the acceptance of a mediator made him a veil between the soul and God ; can anything else be said of any personality that is brought between the soul and the pure ideal ?

VI.

Now, I do not think that the word "God" necessarily carries with it the idea of personality, any more than gravitation personifies what it stands for. There are in nature certain facts beyond which we cannot get,—electricity, attraction, motion. We must have words for them, but no such word is explanatory. Electricity names a phenomenon, but does not pretend to account for it. There are phenomena, which to me appear to represent a principle in nature quite as definite as electricity, and I call it "God." I may be told that most people associate a personality with the word "God ;" well for a long time men personified Electron, and yet we have to use it. The use of language is to be understood. Words are conventional ; they are not substitutes for philosophical definition. If I speak of "sunset" no one has a right to suppose I believe the sun sits down. Now, it may be that what Carlyle once spoke of to a friend, as "the long paraphrase which we shorten in the word God," will some day be better expressed. But at present I do

not know any other word which can make us understood when we mean that sacred influence which is the main fact of our inward life. Every experience must seek its expression, and, thus far, of all the terms for the ideal elements within and without us which denote their reality, the word "God" appears to me the least daring, the least descriptive, while popularly it suggests the Good. Moreover, as no sect can monopolise the word "religion," none can so degrade the word "God:" even when personalised it must be in a generic sense, and can not,—like Jehovah, Vishnu, Trinity, Allah,—be made the figure-head of any cosmogony, sect, or special set of superstitions. It must become an increasingly impersonal expression by the very necessity of being detached from the several personified patron-deities of the various races. When the great Religion of Man has come this term will necessarily stand—as it stands now in the pages of Goethe, Carlyle, Emerson, and many poets—for the indefinable but majestic supremacy of perfect and eternal principles; for their unity, universality, and harmony; for their superlative glory in all things fair and grand, and the passionate love and longing they awaken in the breast of man.

Though the meaning of the word "God" is lost in antiquity, its survival confesses that not one step has been gained towards explanation since that word was coined in the immemorial past. In that great lapse of time the religious aspiration of man has survived the decay of many personal deities: men thought it could not continue without a visible deity with quite as much

reason as some now think it must perish without some personification ; but they did then, they do now, underestimate the imperishable vitality of the moral and religious nature of man. It is precisely that which cannot fail with any form or formula : it grows by their decay. It outsoars all definitions. It comprehends all beautiful things and is comprehended by and in none of them. And when all our speculations are forgotten, or have become subjects of archæological interest, like those of Ptolemy or Hermes, those who come after us will still be chanting with the Persian Sâdi, "O thou that towerest above the heights of imagination, thought, or conjecture, surpassing all that we have heard or read, the banquet is ended, the assembly dismissed, and life draws to a close, and we still rest in our first encomium of thee !"

But here I may be reminded that in speaking of "influence" I am using an anthropomorphic expression. It is indeed a word of human associations, and it is conceded that if we report anything in language at all it must be in terms derived from human experience. But it is not against any word, but against a thing that I contend. If one speaks of the deity as "Father," it may be a simple expression of the heart, as if he had said "Love ;" but if the same individual shrinks from varying the phrase to "Mother" it can only be because the word "Father" has become representative of some anthropomorphic conception. If we mean anything whatever by the word "God" it must at least be what is most exalted in our own human conception, but it may be without the limitations of that conception. Thus, it is anthropomorphic

to say "God loves," for to love is the act of man ; not so to say "God is Love," for we can have no idea of a man who is love. To say "God knows" is anthropomorphic ; not so to say "God is Wisdom." When Jesus said "God is a spirit"—in his own sense of a viewless influence, whose effect we feel as we do the breath of the wind, while we cannot tell whence it cometh or whither it goeth—he raised the mind above every anthropomorphic conception, to the pure elemental realm of ideal and moral existence.

It has become the custom to label everybody with a party-name, and they who refuse to personify God are called Agnostics,—a word meaning one who does not know, but often held to designate one who worships the Unknowable. But for myself I decline to affirm that anything is unknowable. Nor do I worship the Unknown. What I worship is my ideal, as perfect as I can make it. Love, Reason, Right, Beauty are blended and consummate in it. In what mode or modes these subsist in the universe none can know, but it is not my ignorance that I worship ; it is the ideal which I *do* know, though knowing not the metaphysics of it.

But is all this real ? Is there in the universe any reason apart from the brain of man, or any principle of love beyond that manifested in the human heart ? For myself I cannot doubt that there are in nature these supreme elements, which make and mould us rather than we them.

There is in nature an evolutionary order, a geometry, a mathematical uniformity, by which are built the worlds

and the cells of bees, and which make possible the sciences of man. Upon man the universal laws are compulsory: no vote of majorities can alter them, no individual will set them aside. Human culture means their recognition, and human wisdom means instinctive obedience to them. In the wilds of Africa and in the Bank of England alike, two and two make four; and though the interests of a nation might conceivably lead it to enact that two and two make five the laws of number and relation would crush them. Reason is a principle in nature which reaches consciousness in man, but it does not grow into existence through man; for man's growth is an ascension to an inward harmony with it, in place of that coercion by it which, in his lower condition, he shares with plant and animal.

Love exists in nature. It is the principle of progress, and to believe in progress is to believe in God. Recognising as highest within us the attraction of the best, and individual growth as its expression, we look forth upon the world and discern a like law operative there. Life has journeyed from the zoophyte to Shakspeare. Art has journeyed from a naked savage swimming across his river on a log to a civilised man crossing the ocean in a floating palace; from the scrawled picture-letter to the cartoon of Raphael. Humanity has journeyed from the normal war of nomadic savages to courts of law, arbitration, and social comity. Honesty has become the best policy. The peaceful more and more inherit the earth; animal and human ferocities pass away, gentleness and benefit survive and increase. Evermore

a progress towards the better ! Why is this movement not backward ? Why has not there been a steady survival of the morally unfittest ? Why should there not have gone on a steady growth of the slave-trade, a multiplication of slaves, an advance in Russia to double the extent of that serfdom which has been abolished ? Why has not dishonesty become the best policy ? Why this phenomenon of a totality ever moving onward not backward, even the decays of this or that fragmentary and partial civilisation followed invariably by a finer combination, and so contributing to swell the general impulse upward ?

Some theological theists appear inclined to smile at Mr. Matthew Arnold's reverential homage to a "stream of tendency," nevertheless it is in that ark that Faith is to float past the deluge of scepticism and denial. For that stream of tendency is a stream of love, and it must needs pass through mysteries of iniquity, pain, seeming chaos. As we stand on its banks we look forth and see the cyclone in India with its two hundred thousand mortals cut down in a moment, as it were mere weeds under a scythe. What recourse has Faith, but to believe the Ages against the Hour as they attest the power that makes for righteousness, abandoning the whole problem of the *Why* which a discredited metaphysic has foisted upon the religious sentiment ?

It is perfectly true that if we could certainly discern in nature or in history any stream of tendency which makes for evil or wrong, it would be impossible to believe in any deity worthy our reverence. But in

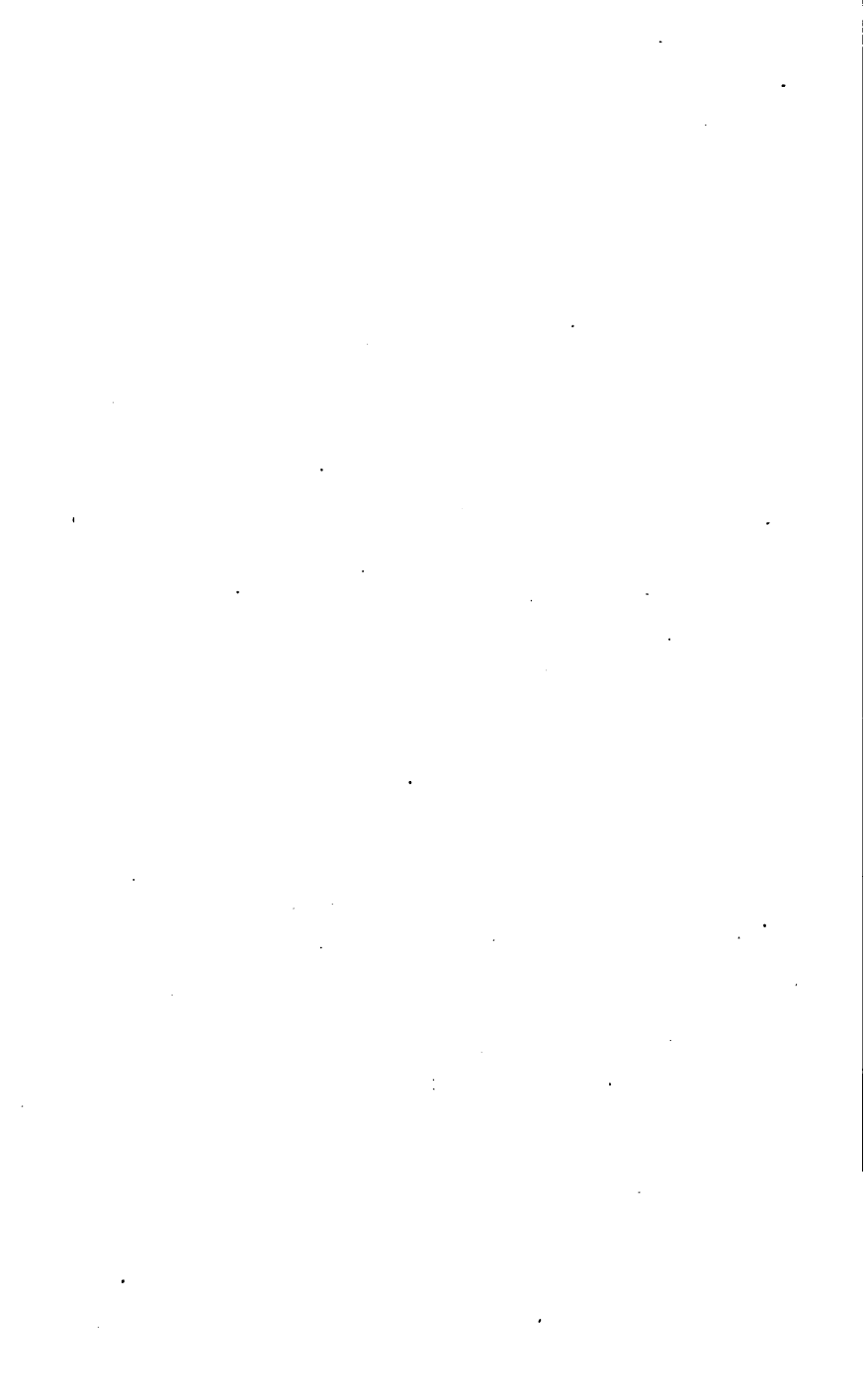
contradiction to the established demon-worship around us with its plain antitheistical dogmas of a personal devil, or an evil principle in the universe, with an eternity equal to the good, Science itself has come to prove that every pang in nature has been a spur of improvement and progress. It shows untold myriads of struggles and agonies, ferocities, efforts of pursuit and escape, summed up into all the forms of use and beauty which surround us.

I decline to theorise about the ultimate causes and absolute nature of things, because I find no powers in myself adequate to the task. But it is not theory that tells me Love exists in this universe, and Reason, and in an ideal perfection which neither individual men nor all mankind have attained. We cannot tell how they originated, or whether they originated, or their mode and relation, or why they do not prevail over the evils of the world instantly,—if they do not! We cannot comprehend the mystery of Love and Thought in our own nature. No Franklin has yet snatched from the air that finer flame which spiritually awakens and renews the universe. To try and analyse ourselves to find a soul is like digging into a stone to discover its electricity. We feel—and why shall feeling be denied its weight?—that these onward-drawing forces, these longings for a completer life, are the profoundest realities of our existence and correspond to their like reality in the universe.

There is an influence beneath which mankind must bend as trees beneath the invisible wind. Sacred ideals arise and overawe our lower nature. We can not—we

will not—endure the thought that the intimations of our immortality mean nothing, because they mean not the egotism of the vulgar, and that the promise of our heart is false. While we muse the fire burns. Emotions ascend and life struggles to ascend with them. From the fair Kosmos whence we have derived a life—how strange, undreamable!—that is real, equally have we derived ideals and cravings that seek their satisfaction in things invisible—in moral beauty, self-forgetting love, the harmony of the inward and outer worlds: and even as a seed in its sod may feel the warm quickening touch of the sun it has never seen, so amid the darkness of the earth the heart may feel stirring within the mystical attraction whose nature it cannot dream, whose sweetness seems to promise a far-off flowering into joy.





VIII.

THE DREAM OF SOCRATES.



THE DREAM OF SOCRATES.

MANY years ago I went to hear a lecture in America by a celebrated spiritualist. In this lecture he gave what he saw, as he said; in a certain trance, the geography of the spiritual world. He described a realm of shining ether, populous with aerial and luminous forms which had once been human beings on earth. These passed hither and thither along pathways, which apparently consisted of electrical currents. Many of these bright beings were gathered around the forms of men and women who, having died on earth, were gradually awakening in this higher world; and this realm above stretched out from the confines of the earth, becoming most distinct as the atmosphere was left behind. Some of its electrical highroads did indeed intersect the air and impinge upon this lower earth, and by these the spiritual beings were enabled here and there to descend and communicate with mortals.

As we left the building where this address had been delivered by the famous spiritualist—Andrew Jackson Davis—I well remember the comments which many of

the assembly made upon it. Nearly all said that the lecturer was quite deranged, that he certainly ought to be in a lunatic asylum. Others regarded him as inspired.

The vision was a (perhaps unconscious) travesty of another seen by one of the wisest of men. Nearly 2,500 years before him, Socrates, while waiting for the hour in which he was to drink the fatal hemlock, related to his friends his dream of the upper world to which he believed himself about to pass. Socrates thought of the universe as one great realm, of which this lower earth was a mere floor. He said the higher world was an extension of this. There are, according to Socrates, many and wonderful places in the earth, and it is itself neither of such a kind nor magnitude as is supposed. We who here inhabit some small portion of it, dwell as frogs in a marsh. But the pure earth is situated in the pure heaven, and what we call the world is but the sediment at the bottom of it. As any creature dwelling at the bottom of the sea may imagine itself on the surface of the earth, ignorant of the higher forms residing on continents, so we imagine ourselves on the surface, and are equally ignorant of the forms dwelling on islands and continents of the ethereal world. As fishes behold the sun and moon through the water, we behold them through the atmosphere. We are weighed down and bound to the bottom of this atmospheric sea by our grossness. We see here forms which are larger than those at the bottom of the sea, more beautiful, and yet similar,—for in the sea there are hills and trees and flowers, all dwarfed; but ours also are dwarfs corresponding to the fairer and larger growths and

scenes of the real surface where our luminous forms dwell. Man is indeed a form climbing slowly from the lower to the higher ; he has got a first foothold on the more real earth ; and by the study of philosophy and purity of life he is to refine his senses, evolve higher organs, which will fit him to ascend at death to the purer realm. There he shall find seasons of a purer temper, admitting of no disease. He shall no longer as here dwell in illusions, but see things as they are.

When the sage had finished his discourse Crito said, "How shall we bury you?" "Just as you please if you can only get hold of me," answered Socrates, with a smile. "I shall not remain with you, but depart." At sunset he enjoined his children and pupils to follow virtue as the path which led upward to the immortals. Then the officer proffered the poison and he drank it. The rest of his moments he employed in trying to console his friends who were far more sorrowful than he, and as he died his last words were—"Crito, we owe a cock to Æsculapius." It is to be feared that these last words show that superstition survived even in that great mind, though one would fain rationalise it, and find therein only an expression of his obligation to the genius of health, the divine physician. The dying tribute of Socrates might well be to Health. Thought had not come out malformed ; ideas had not been diseased ; Æsculapius, son of perfect-formed Apollo, may have been the symbol of the man who so well represented the sound mind in a sound body.

And yet the high speculation of this sound mind,

detached from his age, wrested from the past, and laid before an American audience, had the effect of an actual sacrifice to the *Æsculapius* of superstition, a relapse through twenty-five centuries: it had the sound of insanity. The fair dream of Socrates had become the raving of a spirit medium. Such is the necessity laid upon the world to grow, that the wisdom of one age becomes the folly of another. The child's conception of the stars as angel-eyes may denote a clever imagination; let him retain that idea when he becomes a man and it denotes idiocy.

A great man in the past must be credited not with his bare idea, but with all that has grown out of it. An idea if healthy will show itself such by budding into new ideas, blossoming in related brains, and, if they are truthful ideas, their fruit must be gathered far away, as they ripen into schools of thought. The greatness of this dream of Socrates is not to be found in its testimony to individual immortality. After so many ages we find ourselves on that point still in ignorance,—aspiring with a fair hope, trusting ourselves to a sense of Wisdom and Love in the Universe. But the greatness of the vision of the Greek sage is found in the perception it embodies of an all-pervading unity in Nature. Since then Science has discovered the innumerable worlds ruled by one law; it has discovered planet bound with planet; and detects a medium stretching between our little world and the largest, a medium through which are transmitted the light of the most distant star and its attractive energy. In one sense Science has made our familiar

earth seem as small as it appeared to Socrates—a little nucleus deposited amid the infinitude of that space which is peopled with worlds. But, in another sense, Science has aggrandised our world ; it has shown it to belong to a magnificent system, and thereby made us citizens of a Universe. And it is not too much to claim for Socrates that he vaguely anticipated all this. He had mentally allied this earth with a more universal sphere. He outlined in imagination an all-inclusive realm of which this outer earth was but a large group of molecules. His dream of that nobler grander universe was especially splendid because he saw it related to the inward and intellectual nature of man. This was pure idealism: when man had reached a cosmical development through philosophy he would find himself dwelling in a new earth,—he would find himself no longer creeping about in a little hole and corner of his earth, but residing in a grand and large realm, full of beauty and freedom, with all its growths and heights enlarged. All the air would be refined ; it would be the luminiferous ether of virtue and wisdom. Its inhabitants would be not gross forms of flesh and blood, but beings purified and ennobled.

To see the fulfilment of this dream we must withdraw from it just that which the spiritualist emphasised in it. What he made most of was its form ; we must make most of its substance. He dwelt on the mere localisation of it in upper space, and beyond the portal of death ; but its truth cannot be got at by that preservation of the letter. The essence of the philosophy of Socrates is that a higher nature within implies a higher world without ; that

things dwarfed to the ignorant are enlarged for the knowing ; things gross to the unrefined become all pure to the pure ; that things poor and ugly to the vulgar, become significant, beautiful, cosmical to those who have emerged from animalism and become themselves broad and largely human. In a word, the grand stroke of Socrates was to make the highest heaven an expansion of our own earth, and the path to that heaven a cultivation of our own human faculties. The location of that exalted region in space was merely incidental ; that may pass with his age to which it belonged. When Columbus and his fellow sailors were voyaging westward, they saw in the morning twilight a long bank of flushed and rosy cloud—as they supposed it. The rosy cloud proved to be the North American continent. Many men have similarly projected into the heavens things that really were outlying and unexplored continents of their own minds. Socrates projected entirely into the ether above the atmosphere, that fair realm which increasing knowledge shows to be the most salient and glorious fact of this world, whatever may be discovered respecting super-terrestrial regions.

The royal sensualist, surrounded by his concubines, and jaded with luxury, exclaimed, "There is nothing new under the sun !" The seer on Patmos, exiled and lonely, cried, "I see a new heaven and a new earth !" What a man sees around him depends upon what he has eyes for seeing. It is not the same earth that is looked upon by the eye of ignorance and the eye of science ; very different is the same landscape to the vision of the agri-

cultural labourer and to that of Turner or Wordsworth. He who has polished his senses, cultivated his taste, freed himself from base passions, raised mind and heart into harmony with the spirit of Nature,—that man moves in a very different world from one who is imprisoned in his lower nature. The one walks in the cellar, the other in the saloon of Nature. The one inhabits a closet of the earth, the other abides amid its palatial grandeurs. He sees “the light that never was on land or sea,”—the lustre that only the inward vision can bring to land and sea. The vision of the dying philosopher is a prospect of all that man shall find in his world,—burgeoning with its life from flower to star,—when exalted by virtue his heart throbs with the warm pulses of a universal heart, his intellect is united with universal Reason.

I count the highest gain which philosophy has attained in this age to be the perception that the real way to reach a better world is to secure a better man. If we can regenerate man the earth will follow him swiftly enough. A little more brain added to one man’s head has often changed the whole face of the world. This is the truth which such men as Robert Owen were feeling out—groping after—when they declared that every man is the reflection of his circumstances. That was the stem on which has grown the perception that the better circumstance is the reflection of a better man. The author of that remarkable book entitled “Hereditary Genius”—one of the gospels of our time—sent out circulars to all the leading men of science now living in this country, inquiring of them what kind of people their

parents and grandparents were ; what kind of family training they had ; how they happened to study science, —and asking all manner of questions about their health, habits, and religion. He received about 100 answers to these questions, all fully giving the facts concerning the nature and nurture of the most eminent students of nature in this country. The results of these curious inquiries (whose theological bearings have already been referred to) showed that these great men nearly all had healthy parents ; that their parents had generally been vigorous in mind as in body ; they had not tied their children down with too many rules, and had left them free to follow the bent of their own minds and tastes. Nearly all of them looked back with pleasure on their home education, but with regret on their university education.

One wrote, "At the university I spent most of three years learning Latin and Greek, of which languages I am entirely ignorant." Another wrote, "My college life was a blank waste of time on the classics." Another wrote only the three words "Latin—Latin—Latin," as the sum of all he got at his university. The responses of all indicated abounding vitality and health. One had never had but two aches in his life ; another in thirty years had never been absent from his profession but two days. Nearly all avowed themselves heretics in religion. These accounts of themselves by the average best hundred heads in the country make it plain that, because they were fine products, they were also fine producers. As Shakspeare said, "Nature is helped by no mean, but Nature makes that mean." But at the same time they

were not products of wild uncultivated Nature ; they are ripe results of that culture which makes every good home a conservatory of greatness. They represent Nature realising herself in mind. They are rock and plant crumbling to make brains able to interpret rock and plant. The world is winged by their thought ; and the wings are not stuck on from without, but put forth from within. And yet they are put forth as the result of a long accord with the laws of the universe into which they are born. Such families as those which through generations of study and obedience evolve these men represent that whole ascent from the lower to the higher world which Socrates supposed could be attained only through death, and which people who are a few thousand years behind their time still think is to be gained by some magical potency of the grave.

Whatever reasons we may have for believing or hoping that men survive death, we surely have no reason for believing that any such transformation takes place in the nature or character as that often ascribed to the change at death. Nature is throughout a series of conditions leading to results. There is no royal road to learning, and no short cut to character. Those moral excellencies and intellectual powers which are here to be obtained only by patience, self-denial, fidelity, study, we may be sure will not be obtained elsewhere at a less cost. Socrates saw that any higher world must be only a widening out of this world ; and if science, coming after him, shows the most distant planet similar to our own in substance and revolving by the same force that turns

this, we may be equally sure that we shall never get beyond the stern laws of thought and virtue any more than we shall get beyond the law of gravitation.

We may see, then, in the dream of the Greek philosopher our own old world transfigured in the light of its rational soul. We may see in this dream of heaven the possibilities of earth. I invoke it from the past to remind us again that the pure earth is situated in the pure heaven; that it floats in wisdom as it floats in air; that it is bathed in reason as it is bathed in sunlight. By coarseness and ignorance we sink to the bottom of it, and see only the gross and dwarfed things imbedded in its sediment. We sink by specific gravity of moral dullness and mental torpor. To ignorance the world naturally seems accurst. By aspiration, by knowledge we rise to the height of our world, attain to its ideal grace, realise its meaning, and amid its pomp of purple and gold, its fair hopes, its sweet affections, we need not envy the lot of any angel.

But it may be said, after all this is rather a poor outcome to Socrates' dream of a boundless futurity. What is the use of so much self-denial, patience, study, knowledge, if it may all end when we have reached the end of our stinted term of life on earth? Much every-way. Apart from all hopes of individual immortality it is to be considered that by culture and virtue what life we actually have is immensely prolonged. If, as the Laureate says, fifty years of England are better than a cycle of Cathay, we may also say better one year of the thinker than the immortality of a fool. That man's life cannot

be regarded as brief who is able to crowd each hour with high emotions and call about him past centuries by history, and future ages by imagination. The educated man of to-day is able to share the struggles of primitive man with the early ferocities of nature, to gather with the group surrounding Plato and Socrates at Athens, to sit at the feet of ancient sages and prophets, to walk with Christ on the hillsides of Palestine ; and, on the other hand, he is able to note the tendencies of civilization, to observe the direction of discovery, and realise a clear vision of the world as it shall be,—to live ideally in the distant future. He sees of the travail of his soul and is satisfied.

Admirable indeed is that wisdom with which Socrates preserved a lowly reticence with regard to the physical or metaphysical nature of that *self* of whose survival he felt assured ; it is akin to that of his Jewish brother who said, What is a man profited if he have gained the whole world but lost himself ? The duality of man's nature to the mind of Socrates is that of relative moral values,—the duality of earth and ether, gem and matrix, carbon and diamond. Like him the man of science to-day believes in the unity of nature, and is indifferent whether it be said all is material or all ideal. It is in the marvels which science is revealing in what is called matter, but whose ultimate nature no man knows, that we now find increasing room to admit the idea of individual immortality. It is much that when these atoms, vulgarly deemed godless, have from a minute germ-cell built up the brain of Socrates they have lodged therein a vision of eternal progression ; that when they ascend from plant and pebble to the brain

of Goethe, they *think* "that the destruction of such a mind as Wieland's is not to be thought of: Nature is not so prodigal of her jewels;" that the molecules transfigured in the mount of Emerson's brain testify that the army of intellects are not drilled only to be shot before the action, and that individual immortality "must be proved, if at all, from our own activity and designs, which demand an interminable future for their play." These are the outlooks of men who fairly filled the measure of their days, and did not project into the future resources that might be drawn on in time. It may be, indeed, that the growth of human knowledge and society may unfold powers and treasures in the earth adequate to satisfy all the hopes and give full play to all the faculties of the largest genius; but if so that will surely be immortality and heaven enough. It would fulfil the prophecy of Margaret Fuller who said, "if men knew how to look around them, they need not look above." But whatever may be the lands of earthly promise to which this vision—half cloud, half fire—leads us, there is somewhat stirring in the greatest hearts that seems related to the whole and not any fragment of the universe.

Nor is there anything in the actual condition of science, or in its ideal, inharmonious with the survival, in the molecules liberated at death, of the principle of thought and even of memory. Evolution means nature's rigid economy of all advantages attained; and there is no evidence that *all* improvements may be secured independently of their representative individual minds. Whatever may be the principle of the individual con-

sciousness, we have the pregnant fact that it is able to preserve a continuous existence and identity through all the appreciable changes of form, and to survive the departure of many bodies. A man of seventy-five has possessed at least ten different bodies ; these have come from nature to invest his personality and been successively yielded back to nature ; yet the man feels himself one and the same mind that acted in well-remembered scenes when he was a child. "How," asks Professor Tyndall,* "is the sense of personal identity maintained across this flight of molecules? To man, as we know him, matter is necessary to consciousness ; but the matter of any period may be all changed, while consciousness exhibits no solution of continuity. Like changing sentinels, the oxygen, hydrogen, and carbon that depart, seem to whisper their secret to their comrades that arrive, and thus, while the Non-ego shifts, the Ego remains intact. Constancy of form in the grouping of the molecules, and not constancy of the molecules themselves, is the correlative of this constancy of perception."

But in what does this "constancy of form" lie? Does it belong to the brain in its integrity, or inhere in some subtle quality generated in the molecules when they have been initiated into a certain organisation ; so that each (molecule), or perhaps some more finely-filtered, possibly invisible, group of molecules becomes the seat of the transmitted consciousness? Some portions of the brain may be removed and consciousness still remain ; but as yet no probe has reached its secret residence. The analogies of

* "Fragments of Science," p. 462.

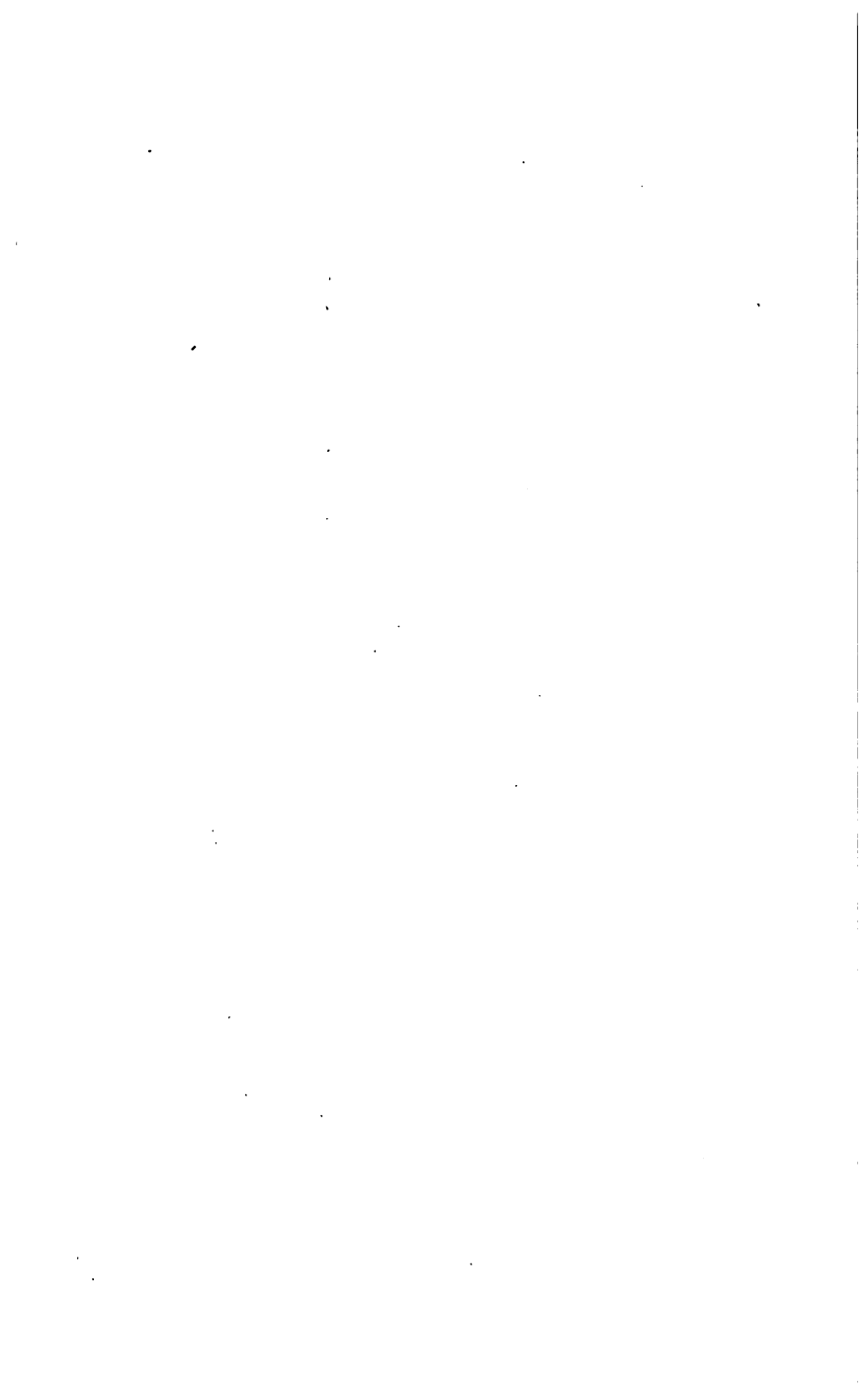
nature would seem to indicate that in life's consummate flower—the brain—there may exist a sacred seed in which its unbroken history is stored, and which may remain when decay has overtaken the stem of flesh and blood, the petals of expression fallen, the individual fragrance vanished. Some brains may indeed have no seed, or such as are only rudimentary; but others may sum themselves up in such to float, winged, into the pure ether in which Socrates and the thinker of to-day alike feel themselves embosomed, to unfold elsewhere in higher development, as their influence and thought are unfolded among men on earth.

May! As yet indeed it is all a great Perhaps. Nevertheless the possibilities, if indeed we may not say probabilities, that our hope may tell true, are sufficient to make us meet with enthusiastic welcome those transcendent discoveries which are unfolding the wondrous potencies of what ignorant ages once thought only coarse, and which those ages still survive in some so-called minds to despise as "mere matter." When we think of the Alhambra in Spain there rises in the memory or imagination the perfected beauty of an entire development of art. Yet the word "Alhambra" only means "red clay." That common red clay which the Spaniards modelled into rude images ascended with the genius of the Moors, cultured it may be under the Persians, until after putting forth many leaves and buds it expanded into the matchless modellings and hues of the immortal building. Nor can we forget that many scholars find the same significance in the name of the traditional first man,—Adam, "red

clay." But in the progress of ages what fine work has been put on that first mere animate modelling of man ! What evolutionary forces have fashioned the complex brain, what accumulated ages of divine art have frescoed its interior walls with tints of imagination and the decorations of love and virtue ! Behold at last the glorious shrine of conscience, the temple of Reason !

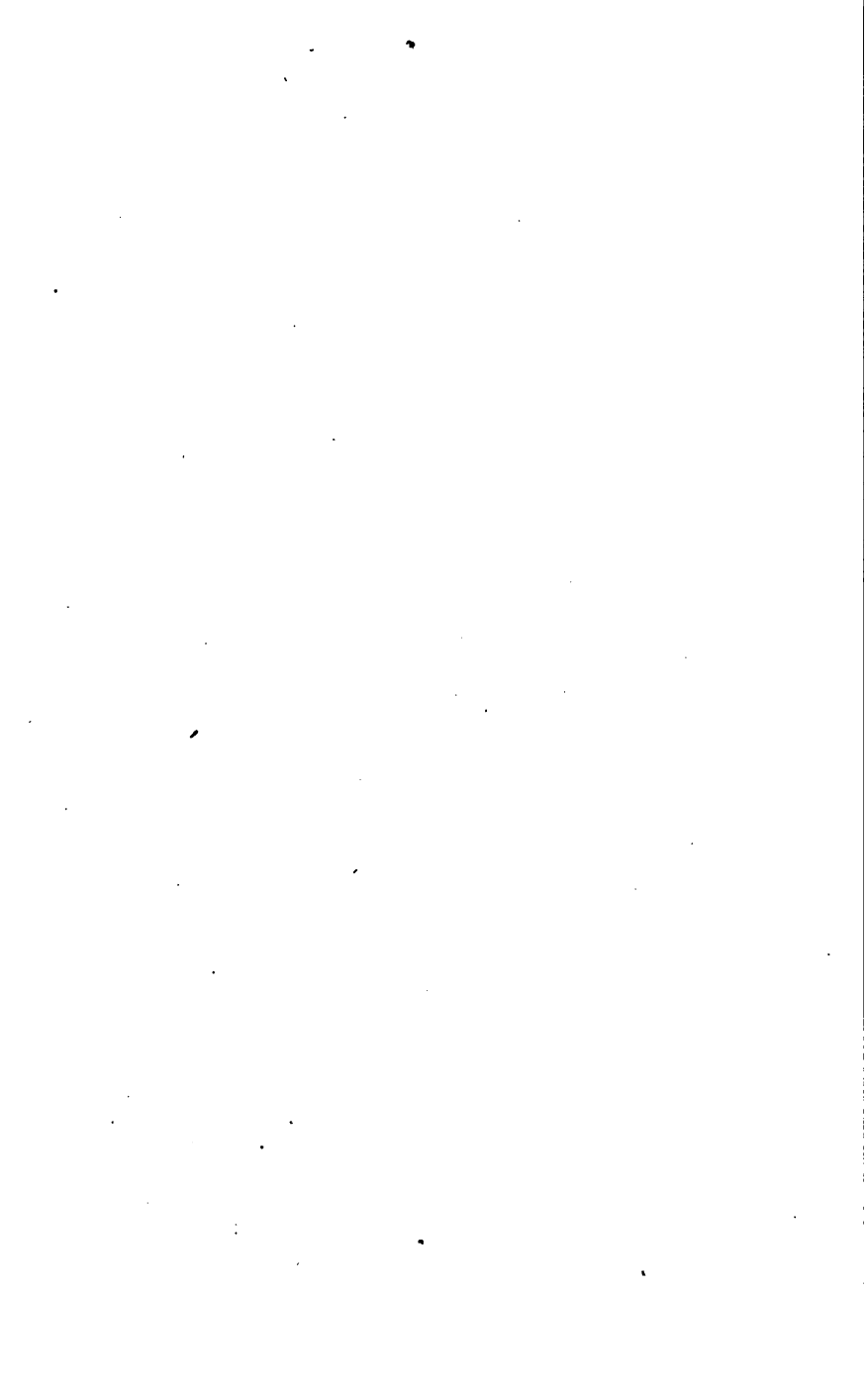
Our ideas of the ascent of matter may not be limited by such illustrations as these. The prism which drew so many colours from the "mere" sunbeam, and now wins from planets their secrets, is but one of the many new eyes which may lie around us—some of them as unnoted as bits of glass—waiting to open before us vistas into undreamed realms of the worlds within and without us. As the low aims and desires, which could alone grow out of a religion that appealed only to fear and selfishness, pass away with the dogmas which fostered them, let us at least see that the new hopes that arise are not based upon unreality nor dependent on enforced compliance with the remnants of prejudice. By so doing we shall not fail to obtain a reward far higher than delusion can offer us. Whatever the future may have in store for us will not be the less reached, while—if a conscious existence—it will be all the more enjoyed by our having wasted no resource, overlooked no opportunity, of the life and the world we actually possess, made what paradise we can around us, and overarched each radiant day with its own eternity.





IX.

FLOWER AND THORN.





FLOWER AND THORN.

MOHAMMED was a man of deeds rather than words, yet that is an impressive sentence which is ascribed to him.—“The Earth is the cradle of Man.” The grandeur of our unattained ideals, the discoveries of science, which with every fact revealed discloses the larger extent of our infantile ignorance, remind us day by day and night by night that we are but babes, In the most ancient times it was the custom of mothers to cover the cradles of their children with mysterious figures and runic charms to protect them against evil spirits ; when Christianity came, there was substituted for these pagan devices the images of saints and texts from the Scriptures, so that even in its cradle the child was surrounded by the symbols of religion. But that great Love, of which are the hearts of mothers, has no less covered the sides of the Earth-cradle with symbols and inscriptions that impress the growing mind long before it can understand them, and whose lessons our ripest years cannot outgrow.

Full of significance are those mystical emblems which surrounded the crude unconscious beginnings of human

thought. Here is pictured on the cradle-side a beautiful tree with ripe fruit; but on that tree hangs a subtle, deadly serpent. So was it in Eden, but not less in other lands. In the South there was portrayed a garden of Hesperus, full of golden fruit, but at its entrance laid a fearful dragon. In the North there was a Tree of the Universe, whose fruits were stars, but a serpent lay coiled about its roots. There were many similar fables showing that man had already felt that in Nature there is no good without an evil beside it.

But in the course of time we find that the human mind, having learned so much, made an effort to translate that co-existence of pain and pleasure into moral meaning. By what processes it worked on we know but little, but we know that our ancestors thought it out deeply and reached some brave results. One of the most striking indications is the name which the Greeks gave to the Furies. The Furies were the terrible forms of pain, scourging and pursuing all evil-doers. Yet the Greeks called them the *Eumenides*, the well-meaning. Though at first, perhaps, euphemistic, the poets couched in that word their discovery that pain is not without its heart of good.

When we come to the religion of ancient Rome we find a still further development of the idea of a good in apparent evil. One of the finest features of Roman theology was that which it received from Etruria. In the more ancient mythology it was held that Zeus wielded the thunderbolts as he pleased, striking whom and what he would without responsibility. But the Roman theology

held that Jupiter was surrounded by a council of the twelve chief gods and goddesses. These gods and goddesses were divided into two classes,—one class called the *Dii Consentes* (the consenting gods), the others the *Dii Involuti* (or wrapped up gods); these being veiled deities who held their hands against their mouths. Now, Jupiter was allowed to hurl his thunderbolts freely for mere terror; but if he wished to do more than frighten he had to consult his cabinet of consenting gods, and only if they agreed could he strike, and then his bolts hurt but also healed. If he wished to blast and destroy, he had to obtain the consent of the *Involuti*,—those veiled deities, who were really the Fates.

Here we have the clearly formed idea of a regulation and a good purpose in evil and pain, instead of chance or caprice. But we meet with a still higher meaning in the fact that the statue of the goddess Angerona was placed in the temple of Volupia. Angerona was the goddess of anguish; Volupia was the goddess of delight. The rites of Angerona were performed in the temple of Volupia, to denote that sorrow is related to pleasure.

These instances,—which might be multiplied,—suffice to show how long and patiently the heart and mind of man have been struggling to harmonise the phenomena of good and evil, and find them equally representative of the divine unity in Nature. They have transmitted the problem to us: they could not altogether solve it; but as we receive it from them it is enveloped with a radiant and perfect faith that in some way or other evil is only apparent, the bitter rind of sweetness.

It appears to me that under the higher light cast on Nature in our day, we are able to emerge a step from this old darkness, and to spell out whole sentences where our forefathers struggled with the alphabet.

Let us take the rose and the thorn ; if we find out their relation and meaning we will have explored heaven and hell. There is no evil in nature which is not represented in a thorn,—no good which may not be typified in the rose. The pleasure-principle in Nature, and the pain-principle, are brought together on every bush that bears both flowers and thorns. Now, why does a bush or tree bear thorns? We know precisely why that is. The thorn is put forth to protect the flower. Flowers do not all have thorns ; some are protected by having a bad odour ; some by being poisons or like poisons, which grazing animals avoid ; others by growing on steep places inaccessible to those that would harm them. But all these defences are a kind of thorn,—the poison, the bad odour, the dangerous precipice, answer to the flower the same end as a thorn. A child grasps at a rose and its hand is pierced by a thorn. It forgets all about the flower in its pain, and wonders why the good God should make thorns. The real answer would be that the thorn is put there to pierce children's fingers, and the tongues and lips of other animals, so as to prevent their killing off the flowers. If there had been no such thing as a thorn the child would never have had a rose to tempt him at all. Another child is stung by a bee, and complains to the Universe against the existence of stings. Very well, little friend, let there be no sting and you must get

on without honey. A hundred animals would devour the bees, were it not for their stings, and exterminate these and all other manufacturers of sweetness from the earth. In the pain of thorn or sting you may forget the flower and the honey ; but if the bee or bush be examined it will appear that the pain they can inflict is not the end for which they exist. They exist for beauty and sweetness ; their defensive apparatus is hidden beneath, and only used in an emergency.

Thus we begin with very easy lessons ; but all the ills of Nature are not so simple. If there be a rose and thorn on our cradle-sides there is also a deadly serpent there—moral evil, guilt. There are agonies which it is difficult to connect with any use at all. The sting of a bee protects honey ; but what good is protected by that crawling magazine of death—the cobra snake ? and what by the venomous reptile when it has climbed to the form of a man ?

Philosophy has discovered that the method of extending our knowledge is to apply more accurately and widely principles with which we are already partly familiar. I suppose it was after the ancients had found out that in some cases evil was at heart good that they believed all the Furies' well-meaning. Why may we not consider all the evils under the sun as thorns ?—and why may not all be doing the good work which thorns do for flowers and fruits ?

As we have already seen, Evolution shows all the fine activities of animated Nature produced by danger and suffering. One animal became swift because it was necessary to

outrun some other animal that was seeking to destroy it. Another animal became intelligent because it had to outwit some stronger animal that was its enemy. The velocity, the sagacity, the imitateness, which we see in the brute world, came there because there were dangers to be avoided; pains to be escaped, because they were environed with destructive forces. Slowness and stupidity became fatal; and so Death gave birth to the various energies of Life. That horrible serpent helped to give to the bird its wings; for it devoured the bird that could not soar out of its reach.

Next let us take the naked, savage man. We know well that his every step in physical improvement was taken to avoid some danger. To avoid the bad weather he clothed himself; to escape the flood or the wild beast he exchanged his rude hut for a good house; to cope with foes he invented weapons and implements. Danger roused his faculties; evil stimulated his wits and his energies. It is notorious that where there is the greatest hardship amid Nature, there man has become most civilised. I say hardship, for there may be regions where Nature becomes so hard as to be prohibitory; what I mean is that, where Nature is so luxuriant as to render life less difficult, there is never the same advance of skill and intelligence as in regions where existence and happiness demand perpetual thought and energy. Our highest powers have thus been developed by what we call evil, just as the rose has been developed by its briar. If there had been no danger to escape, no enemy to conquer, no difficulty to surmount, there is reason to

believe that man would have been a witless, stupid, soulless animal ; in fact, there could have been no such being as man at all.

And I submit that the same rule may be applied to what we distinguish as moral evil. All the moral laws have been written by crimes. The eternal mandates have been thundered from the Sinai within us in response to violations of them. There is good reason why each commandment begins "Thou shalt not,"—instead of "Thou shalt." It was because each was brought to light through some wrong done. Nor can it be said, in reply, that if there were no evil the great moral laws would be of no advantage. Far beyond their mere ability to punish criminals is the use of the moral laws. They mark the culture of man ; they indicate the ethical structure of the Universe. The advantage of knowing the laws of electricity does not end with giving us telegraphs ; of much more value than telegraphs is the growth so added to the intellect of man. And, similarly, the sentences of courts are trifles compared with man's discernment of the great moral and social laws which are the very lineaments of the Divine Wisdom and Justice organised in Nature.

But in studying this subject there is a point at which the order of Nature seems reversed, or rather inverted. We have thus far dealt with pain as the thing which all beings are seeking most to avoid, and pleasure as that which all are seeking. But after the animals have been developed by this perpetual avoidance of pain ; after the savage man has been clothed, housed, and even civilised, by the same stimulant ; we come to a phase of human

life where what we call pain is no longer the most powerful motive. The man most revered among us was not crowned with flowers, but with thorns. Around him grew the lilies and the roses of life, as around others ; but he gathered the thorns,—the scourge, the hatred, the cross,—plucking from the Garden of Gethsemane only its agony. And as he stands in our vision, with him is a great army of martyrs, of men and women who found life's joy amid dens, and deserts, and flames. But the contradiction here is only seeming. For the soul, too, is a mystical rose, and the thorn that protects it is the conscience. When Jesus wears thorns upon his head it is only because all the roses are blooming in his heart. The sting he dreads is guilt ; the fang he avoids is that envenomed with inward falsehood ; and the thorns that tear only his flesh are pleasant, for each implies a bloom in his deep spirit. The old law which has raised the world by pain and fear does not cease when good men seem to welcome what others dread ; it only passes inward, and becomes the fear and horror of spiritual evil which protect the purity of the heart and stimulates the will to put forth its tremendous energies. Our moral nature has been created by evil, and the dread of evil. Every virtue marks the recoil from a sin. Flower and thorn are deep within us ; and there was never a Heaven which was not rooted in a Hell.

A thinker once remarked that the chief puzzle in this universe was the evil caused by things good. Nothing causes more mischief than many of our best feelings and efforts. What agonies and desolations have grown out

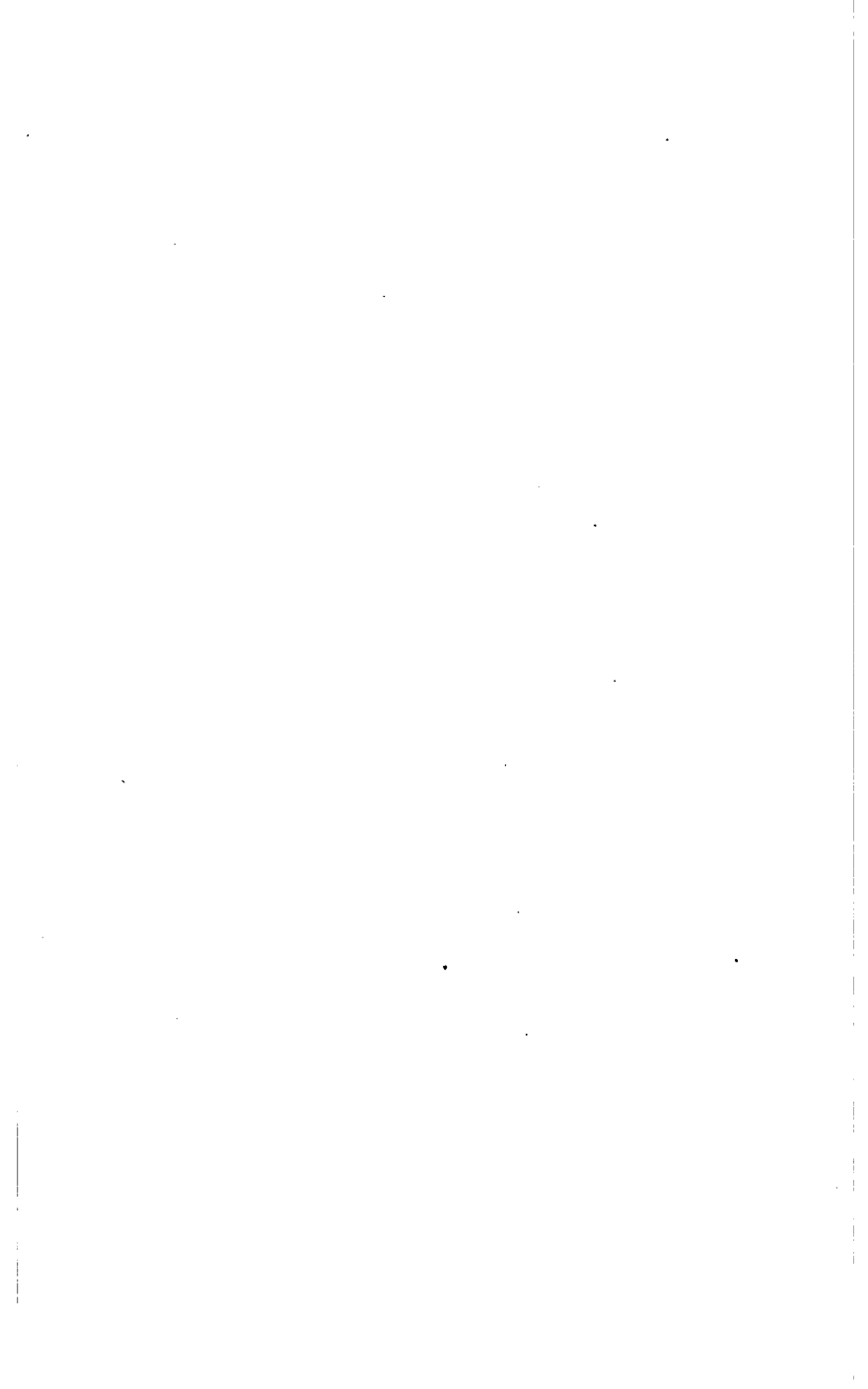
of human love. What pain has been caused by the desire of liberty. But really there is no puzzle here. It is only what we have seen—that Nature is sure to put a sting where she wishes to secure honey. The more sweet the product aimed at the sharper the protecting sting. It is because it is so necessary that human love shall be pure and secure, that all violations of its laws are so fiercely punished. It is because liberty is so essential that all misdirected efforts for it end in sorrow and failure.

Optimi corruptio pessima.

But here, indeed, we pause before the veil which has never been lifted. Why pain and guilt should be the method of the Universe we know not ; it is even one of those problems which to some bear signs that they can never be solved. It must content us to know that there is no evil that exists in any sense but as a condition and method of good. Darkness is not the equivalent of Light. There is no shawdow but points to the light.

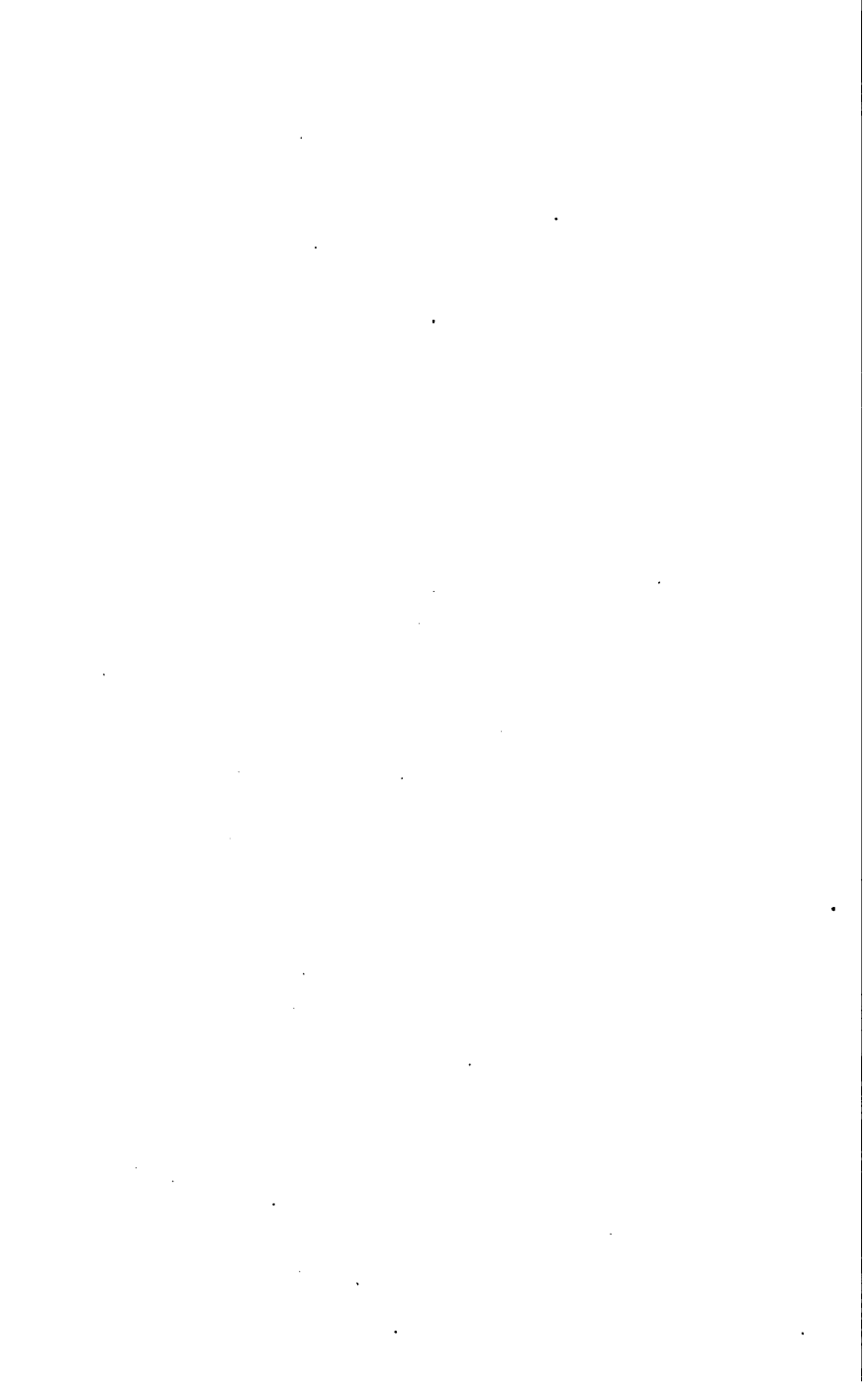
Among the ancient topes recently discovered in India there is one representing devotees gathered around the Tree and Serpent, and each worshipper is shown holding his tongue, literally, between finger and thumb : the significance of this attitude is lost unless we can find it in the archives of our own breast, and learn, in presence of the world's fair growths, to meet its types of pain with the homage of silence.





x.

REAL AND IDEAL.





REAL AND IDEAL.

I.—REALISING THE IDEAL.

IN the second part of the drama of Faust, Goethe has introduced two scenes which, taken together, show the ideals that may, and those that may not, be realised.

Faust and Mephistopheles appear at the Imperial Court, where Faust wishes promotion. They find the emperor on his throne, with the fool on his right hand and the astrologer on his left,—Frivolity and Luck being his main dependence,—while the empire is in anarchy through utter bankruptcy. The great want of everybody, from the peasant to the prince, is money. Mephistopheles is called upon to make the empire rich and happy. That is precisely what the clever demon is good for. That is exactly the kind of ideal perfected cunning can help man to realise, at least seemingly. The art of printing, which Faust has invented, is brought into requisition. Mephistopheles floods the empire with paper money. Everybody suddenly becomes rich. In court and street they rush about with joy, hands full of paper wealth, and the imperial exchequer is full to overflowing.

The demon, of course, observes cynically the complete satisfaction so cheaply supplied; and he notes that the only person who has the least suspicion about this wealth is the court fool. The emperor has lavished on his fool five thousand paper crowns, and the latter asks Mephistopheles if it really is money's worth, if it will buy cattle, house, land? Mephistopheles assures him that it will; and the fool says, then he will spend it all instantly. This resolution not to wait, but to change the paper for land as soon as possible, elicits from the devil the only honest compliment he ever paid to any mortal. As the fool hastens to spend his money, Mephistopheles says, "Who can say that fool is without brains?"

So much for the ideal that is attainable. In the other scene, Faust, whom the paper money has raised high at court, is commissioned to get up a tableau to amuse the emperor, and he now demands of the demon that he shall raise for the scene the Greek Helena—the ideal of Beauty, as exalted and purified through the perspective of ages. Mephistopheles is much annoyed at this demand. It's easy enough, he says, to raise paper ghosts, but to raise Greek ideals, he intimates, is not only difficult, but too heathenish for a Christian devil like himself. However, he gives Faust a key by which he may visit the mysterious Mothers,—the primal laws, I suppose, the conditions that must be fulfilled before any high thing can be reached,—and the tableau is thus rendered possible. The emperor and his court assemble, and there is a sort of seance, the light being lowered. At length the mist parts at one end of the room, revealing Paris sleeping. Next, Helen

appears—approaches. Faust beholds in that ideal being what through all his life he has been seeking, and this glimpse of perfect beauty degrades and deforms other objects. Mephistopheles seeing his agitation, warns Faust to be calm, and not break the conditions. But when Paris is bearing Helen away, Faust, uncontrollable, rushes forward—seizes her. Then straightway Helen vanishes; everything vanishes—court, emperor, all; Faust falls senseless. When he comes to himself he is in his old narrow Gothic room—prostrate.

Such was the result of an attempt to grasp the ideal—to enjoy the perfect by a stroke—to leap to the top of the stairway, and realise supreme beauty without patiently climbing the intervening steps. It is only very low aims—the mere promises-to-pay of life, not life—which, like the paper money, can be easily secured. Whoso can be satisfied with the shows of things shall be satisfied. And so far as any intellectual ideal is to be procured, all wealth, however solid, is but paper,—it is but the promise, not the reality of life.

In the great poem of Goethe we may see depicted the struggle of man to fill out the halfness of his nature. First we see the tragedy of Faust and Margaret: passion madly clutching visible beauty, to find it turn to ashes: next intellect clutching invisible beauty, only to find it also fading away. It is the allegory of all ages,—especially of our own age. The nineteenth century has been filled with feverish dreams,—dreams unfulfilled. We have seen it animating whole empires. The century opened with a great military Mephistopheles, raising before France a

vision of universal empire : twice did that nation grasp at the wild phantasy, and twice did it find itself hurled to the ground ; once on the field of Waterloo, once on the field of Sedan. The Russian empire, the Austrian empire, the Spanish, the Papal, they have all despised the slow steps of patience, they have sought to gain by splendid leaps the rewards of steady progress, and been hurled back to hard narrow walls, prostrate—with the mocking devil of delusion at their side.

Not very different has been the fate of those who have aspired to nobler ideals,—the children of revolution, who have fought and won so many victories for ideal justice and right only to find their victories dragged to the support of oppression and wrong.

Yet a higher horizon of our century is visible, where shine the poetic hearts who have tried to embody their visions in perfect societies. The socialist dreamers came to their several fig-trees, but the time of figs was not yet : under the breath of the hard actual each ideal withered. There is a small house in Paris before which I have sometimes paused, and thought of the two great men who had lived there. The first was a poet—Molière—who 200 years ago cherished his gay ideals,—ideals not too high for a certain realisation, which art gave them in the mimic life of the stage. But this terrible century, as it dawned with lurid light, found seated there a poet resolved that his ideals should be realised on the stage of the world. It was Saint-Simon. There it was this French Count—descendant of Charlemagne—set himself to the task of creating a new society, a

new Christianity, a new man. There was to be a Parliament of Industry, a Church of Science and Art, universal education, universal love. This happy dream was portrayed with every touch of beauty, every artful tint of picturesqueness; no argument omitted that sentiment, scholarship and eloquence could bestow upon it. At the age of sixty the old man sat there, and before him his divine model, like the statue carved by Pygmalion, awaiting only a breath to become a living form and soul. Then he turned from its fascinating beauty to look around him. He found himself and his family on the verge of starvation. His last coin had gone to print books that no publisher would undertake, and no public would buy. No help came to him. Nobody was interested in his rainbow visions, save one or two followers poor and powerless as himself. So Saint-Simon concluded it was time to die. He loaded a pistol; appointed a certain minute at which to end his life. Then he occupied the remaining time with finishing touches on the books that represented the labours of his life. When the hand of the clock reached the appointed moment he fired at his head. After some time his two friends Comte and Sarlardière entered and found him not yet dead, but awaiting his end with tranquillity. They applied themselves to his relief, but Saint-Simon said, "How can a man live and think with seven slugs in his brain!" Even in his agony he could not think of life apart from thought. Yet live he did, to complete that philosophy which supplied the framework of Comte's Positivism, and of the social scheme which others endeavoured to realise in European and American communities.

The enthusiasm of idealists like these might move the very stones to admiration. A thousand low successes around us are worth less than one such pathetically noble failure. Such lives and tragedies are failures only in the sense that the cross was a failure ; but for such aims and failures the earth would lose its halo and float on, a mere ball of dust. But we must not throw away experience ; we see how the fruit and grain garner the light of days and seasons, to reappear in their red flush and golden ripeness : the lives of the great and true visit us with intenser rays, and no quickening soul should rise and set without leaving its glory with us, transmuted to larger benefit.

What we learn, first of all, is that the ideal never descends. The divine Word is never made flesh. In founding themselves upon the theory of *Incarnation* many religions have made a fundamental mistake. The higher never descends to the lower. It never stoops to conquer. Not descent but ascent, not incarnation but apotheosis, is the theme that comes to us from the great—not least from him who climbed the mountain and adored the ideal till his face was altered, and his raiment transfigured, snow-pure in the exceeding brightness. The perfect cannot help us by bending, by becoming imperfect : it can help us only by shining on there—the pure uncompliant Perfect. To embody an ideal were to destroy it. Every idol was once an ideal. All the gods have been destroyed by the attempt to embody them. All the fairies were once ideals ; by being lowered for vulgar realisation they declined to anthropomorphic gods

and goddesses ; in the nurseries, and in the cottages of peasants, they were diminished for the comprehension of childhood and ignorance ; and so remained to haunt field, forest, and hut, as spectres, fairies, and pixies. Hence it is that genius has learned to adore that only which for ever soars above actual achievement. Cicero was alarmed at the representations of the gods in sculpture. " Who can say," he asked, " but that the populace may one day fancy that these statues are the gods themselves ?" Precisely that did come to pass. The average man is unimaginative ; his wings are not strong enough to sustain him in any long flight ; and they can never grow stronger if he is permitted to drag down to his own level the beauty to which he must aspire if he would feel its transforming power. The ideal is essentially that which cannot be enclosed or shut in,—not more than you can imprison the dawn. Great religions have tried to put the soul of man in their creed-closet, and heaven under their lock and key. But when they are opened there is a smell of mould as if their prize lacked sunshine and air. That religion seals its own doom which binds itself to a defunct ideal. The childhood of the world was pleased with pictures of heaven which cannot satisfy maturer age.

Can any civilised man's nature be conquered and changed by the prospect of sitting on a rosy cloud and blowing a golden pipe in a heavenly concert ? Why even in the east, where humanity is more childlike than here, the paradise of Mohammed—tall beauties in an endless rose-garden—does not attract so many souls as

the eternal sleep promised by Buddha. And in Christendom every ideal of the future has faded ; its immortality is shapeless. Nathaniel Hawthorne said, "The future I hope for is Repose. I trust for at least a thousand years of unconscious, undreaming rest." A venerable and eminent woman, who has devoted her life to human welfare, said to me recently, "I feel death approaching, but it is no enemy. It will bring me to the end of my existence in Nature. I have considered the arguments for immortality, and am convinced they are worthless. I have no desire for any heaven of which I have heard or read. But I have my hope, my ideal of a future life : it is that the particles of which I am composed may rise again in grass and bloom in flowers, may pass into the general life of nature, and go on to benefit the world." Now, dear as the hope of conscious survival beyond the grave may be to any of us, who can fail to see that this aged woman's ideal—that every particle of her form would continue to repeat the charities of her life—is a more religious, a more unselfish ideal, than the resurrection for an existence of personal bliss represented in the vulgar heaven? It is true that the idea of conscious immortality is not involved in the absurdity of bodily resurrection. Certainly there may be a very high ideal which hopes for the renewal of conscious activity of mind and heart. But whatever be the dream, the salient fact stands out that the promises of theology are no longer equal to the promises of the soul: the human ideal has soared successively above the Valhalla of Odin, the heights of Olympus, the rosy cloud with cherubs and

trumpets,—far above them all. The old heavens surround us now, only as the signs of the zodiac, dead because smitten by the light of a larger hope. And yet we feel that in each of those forms the best that is in us once lodged. The progressive life made each for its mansion; unmade it when it became a prison. No mere part can hold him who aspires to the whole.

But this, you may say, is to set us moving on a vicious circle. Warning you by all the extinct heavens, whether painted on the ether by poets, or planned on earth by visionaries, that you can never grasp the ideal, I still tell you man is born to seek it. It is even so. It is a melody no heart can live without, though so often as we listen, we must say, "Thou tellest me of things that in all my life I have not known and shall not know!" For yet every chord of our being may vibrate in response to it, and the whole life may be harmonised by the endeavours after the fuller expression, to which we are drawn by every intimation of a higher thought, or happier character, or nobler aim. The better we may reach, though not the best; but no one ever found the better who did not aim at the best. To the mathematician the perfect circle is always ideal; the truest circle he can draw is only proximate; yet had he no ideal circle his actual one would be far more incomplete. Now the ideal and the actual do not coincide, but they accord; the lower may be endlessly improved, and every step is in the direction of the highest; the lines of tendency which lead up to that highest harmonise with it, as the sides of a pyramid harmonise with the apex.

In human life, therefore, tendency must always be the main thing. What is the direction of a man's faculties, his aims? If you know the angles of convergence of the sides of the pyramid, the point at which they will meet if continued may be computed. If the tendencies of life are in the direction of an ideal the apex may be equally recognised, though it may not be reached. In youth our actual and our ideal seem to be not only distinct but hostile to each other. But the main lesson of life is to learn that they are really friends, and culture means the raising of the law of our lower nature into harmony with the firmament of reason that vaults above our little world of animal power.

In truth, that which may rightly be called the ideal is a force—the building force in nature. No doubt it was so from the beginning, and that each of the swarming myriads of creatures—the zoophyte in its waterdrop, the moth shriveling in the candle—has followed its little pillar of fire, has sought its promised land; and so seeking has put forth its supreme energies, and added its infinitesimal impulse to the growing world of form. What kindling passion for the rose tinted the butterfly, what lowly idolatry of things soaring above it mingled with the lower utility by which creeping things gained their wings,—we know not; what we know is that along with the prosaic utilitarian actual life which we have inherited from the realms beneath us, we have drawn within us the universal laws that wrought through their unconsciousness. By them man may work to universal ends.

The best thing in every noble dream is the dreamer

himself. Faust clutching at the perfect ideal of Greece, to be thrown back on hard actuality ; the poor French socialist with a fair heaven in his brain and starvation around him,—represent Man, able to apprehend where he cannot comprehend. They leave us the same old earth rolling on as before, but they have outlined a higher Man, which the ages must fulfil. How sacred are they, the seekers of the invisible, the wayfarers who will not rest on anything short of the beautiful idea that has ravished them !

How they go by—those strange and dreamlike men!
One glance on each, one gleam from out each eye,
And that I never looked upon till now,
Has vanished out of sight as instantly.

Yet in it passed there a whole heart and life,
The only key it gave that transient look;
But for this key its great event in time
Of peace or strife to me a sealed book.

To a human being his ideal represents his individual existence. One life we each have which is merely hereditary. We received it from our ancestors, we share it with others, it is a common property. There is another life which is our own. There each stands in the presence of his own Sinai, receives the tables of the law of his individual life. To him there comes a Decalogue of private interpretation, and the voice commands—"See that thou do all things after the pattern thou did'st see on the mount !" So indeed must he work—if the world is to be better by a feather's weight for his life in it ;—so must he build, quarrying his hereditary nature, polishing it for his individual structure. Nor shall he pause to

ask whether the edifice is to be completed and adorned, and labour give way to happiness. He cannot reach the great end, because there is no end ; the scale is infinite ; so have the poets said, who reached the seeming summit, only to behold a higher height rising before them ever more. Let it be enough for each that the genius of God finds no obstruction in him ; that he is part of the organising force of the universe,—as much so as the coral building in the sea, or the sun that vitalises a world. And when his day is past and his bit of work is done, the ideal he has served will whisper a sweet and secret joy—Thou hast laboured, and others will enter into thy labours.

II.—IDEALISING THE REAL.

We have found “realising the ideal” to be impracticable in the proportion that the ideal is raised high. But “idealising the real,” as I shall maintain, is not only practicable, but the main secret of the art of living.

First I must make my phrase clear. The word “idealising” is sometimes used to mean the putting into a thing of what is not in it. People are said to idealise a character in the sense of investing a person with qualities they do not possess. It is sometimes said of a portrait that it is idealised, by which is meant that the artist has flattered the subject of it. But this is a loose way of using a good word. We have words which directly signify the investment of a thing with fictitious values,—to exaggerate, to flatter—and we need not confuse with these the word “idealise,” which means to

see a thing in the form of pure thought. There is nothing that has not a real relation to thought, nothing without its ideal side. Take, for example, the portrait which an artist is said to have flattered. If he has flattered it he has connected with his subject something incongruous with it, as much so as if he had painted a thistle to make it look partly like a rose. The only true portrait that artist would have painted would be himself, and it would show him no true artist. But, on the other hand, if he idealised the face, it might appear on his canvas more attractive than the subject seems to an ordinary eye. That would show that the artist had looked on his subject with an extraordinary eye,—had searched into it, seen it in its best light, interpreted its deeper characteristics. A great portrait-painter was once asked if, in the large number who sat to him, he did not find many faces that were totally uninteresting or even repulsive. He replied, "I never had to paint a face which did not possess lines and meanings beyond my power to seize and portray." That artist had cultivated the power of true idealisation, that is of seeing beneath the surface and getting at the subtle spirit which requires interpretation.

Another new commandment our age gives unto us—that we stick to the truth. In no case must we exceed the simple fact; but, also, in no case must we fall short of the fact; and if we fulfil this rule we shall find that every fact has its own ideality. If a reality is dry it is because we see it only in part, detached from its large relationship. I was one of a company which assembled

to hear a favourite lecturer. But we were generally disappointed when we learned the subject to which we were to listen. It was "Whitworth's planes, standard measures and guns." We were for the most part indifferent to ironclads and guns, and had a misgiving that not even the eloquence of Professor Tyndall could make them interesting. But we were mistaking the subject. With breathless interest the gentlemen present, and ladies as well, followed the story of how an humble toolmaker had begun in poverty and loneliness the work of mastering the secrets of iron and steel ; how little by little he had secured a plane of perfect level ; had made a measure that would measure the millionth part of an inch, and enabled the wonderful plexus of nerves in the finger to appreciate a movement to the extent of that millionth of an inch ; had discovered the method of reducing steel to a hardness that no force of explosion could affect, and the exact curves by which a ball would accumulate the highest attainable propelling power. A lady remarked that after hearing this lecture it seemed almost a fine thing to die by one of Whitworth's guns ! The charm was that each dry fact mirrored universal laws : the stars in their courses attended those iron balls. The brutal art of war, as the Professor called it, was hidden out of sight by the splendid play of laws and forces which showed our age of iron in travail with an age of light. The audience had thought they knew something about iron, and quite enough about cannon : what they knew was the mere surface, the dismal dexterities of slaughter. What had science now done ? Simply trans-

lated the facts to their ideas ; and thereby given us each a new eye to see what was really there, and what will remain there to fulfil the possibilities of civilisation when the poor surface-uses of to-day have passed away, and nations learn war no more.

Other things equally savage in their original purpose have already attained a complete translation into thought. Barbarians took infinite pains to shape weapons of flint by which to slay each other : their only use now is that which scholars may find, they are purely anthropological ; from those once deadly arrows is being read the story of primitive man. And now again cunning Nature entices nations to vast outlays of wealth and enterprise with promise of securing a gun or ship stronger than their neighbours'. But when all those immediate ends and uses have passed away, when they have followed the flints into the museum, the ideas in them, the grand truths will expand above their shrivelled antiquity to decorate an era of love and reason.

To idealise the real means to see things as they are. Coleridge said there is a suggestion of immortality in the fact that every emotion is greater than that which gives rise to it. We all know how a slight incident, a small suggestion, a word, may set in motion large feelings, and great purposes. This fact shows that each thing—whether it be visible, as a flower ; or audible, as a word ; or entirely subjective, as a pain ; or however little it may be—has an element in it related to the whole of our mind ; an element of ideality which enables it to awaken the ideality within us, like a single note sung over the strings of a piano

to which they all sing back again in the same pitch, but gathering up related harmonies.

It is an error to think that when any outward thing is idealised it is simply an individual mind that does the whole work : no object can be idealised if no idea is in it. If I speak of intellectual light, is it all a conceit? Might the human race have just as properly agreed to call knowledge darkness,—say, because it brings out the stars? This indeed would have been a conceit, a mere fancy. But when knowledge is called light it is a true imagination : the mind of man has flashed back all the way to its genuine origin, the actual light of which the thought of man is the fullest, the only real expression. Or take some smaller thing, the scarabæus, which the Egyptians consecrated as a type of earthly and celestial existence. Was it a mere conceit? Was there no real connection between the beetle and the belief in immortality? The connection was most real. The beetle deposits its egg in a little round ball of earth ; buries that ball, and then perishes ; when the winter has passed, and the earth is renewed, out of the little grave where the egg was deposited comes a tiny burnished scarabæus. Now, if you analyse man's belief in immortality you find that it is simply his dislike of mortality : he desires to live to-day, to-morrow, as long as he can, to prolong and reproduce himself in offspring, in fame and family. Man's sense of immortality expresses all the variations of the longing for renewal and survival ; and the same longing may be traced from the conscious to the unconscious, a principle in nature nowhere more strikingly illustrated than in the scarabæus whose little

life is summed up in the seed it buries with hope of resurrection. These things are not coincidences in nature ; rather they are correspondences ; the outward world expresses the inward because the one grew out of the other. George Herbert wrote :—

Herbs gladly cure our flesh because that they
Find their acquaintance there.

And he might have gone further than flesh ; he might have affirmed that the outward world in organising our body, brains, senses, did even then but climb to its bud ; that beyond this there was to be—there has been—the expansion of the visible bud to an invisible flower ; but in that sacred flower—mind—coloured with celestial light, there is not a tint nor a fragrant character but has been drawn from the whole universe. And in the mind which each contributed to constitute each must now find its interpretation. Man's mind is an epitome of the universe, and while his intellect draws universal laws within to make the order of reason, those very same universal laws are controlling every outward atom—every leaf, sand-grain, dewdrop—and are reflected in them as genuinely as in the mind of man. It is that which makes science possible—the order of nature answering to the order of thought ; which Kepler devoutly realised when, exploring the heavens, he cried, “ Great God ! I think thy thoughts after thee ! ” Therefore each thing holds a secret for the mind ; only when it has passed into thought, has anything told all that is in it ; only when divested of what is casual, and set where the collective light of All plays through and through

it, is it idealised and so seen fitted to its place in the Cosmos.

Man's dream of Heaven, whenever noble, is a transcendent vision of this world idealised. The proverb says, familiarity breeds contempt ; to which one has fairly added—in the contemptible. Poets have found the law of the stars at work in the daisies. Consider again Socrates' dream of an ethereal world inhabited by perfected human beings. Since Socrates' time man has ascended to a higher world : telescopes have shown us the stars as they are ; we have measurably abolished the atmospheric ocean ; we have actually, by science and art, gained the larger part of Socrates' heaven, and have a fair chance of reaching the rest of it. Certainly we have learned that the man makes a great mistake who waits for his heaven until he dies. Whatever world may succeed this, it will find man or his molecules still environed by laws and conditions which must be patiently fulfilled ere he or they can attain unto truth or beauty. If he anywhere finds a heaven it will be because he can make it. And he can begin here and now as well as there and then. Indeed if he can shape no heaven out of the materials he has here, there is little reason for hoping he will do any better elsewhere. All this postponement of joy to a future life ; all this vain imagination of supreme goodness to be reached through providential favour instead of patient moral culture ; of baseness arbitrarily raised to excellence, and ignorance to divine knowledge ; all this, and the method of it—bending of knees, movement of lips, fawning on gods—comes within the category of the

vain effort to realise the ideal by snatching at it. It is an effort to outwit the internal laws that must for ever fail.

When Faust beheld the personification of intellectual beauty—the Greek Helena—and sought to grasp her, she instantly faded away. He was hurled back to the old attic where he started. But then the scholar began his real quest for that ideal which he had seen in his highest moment. Through long and patient study, by learning all the conditions through which Greek art had evolved that ideal—through sorrow, toil, obedience—he at last finds Helena again. Then again she fades away ; but her raiment dissolves into a light cloud which surrounds him, and bears him away to a country where the earth is rich and a race of idlers dwell. Marshes, stagnant pools, invade the land whose rank luxuriance reveals its equal potency for good. Here, cries Faust, is my possible Paradise ! He calls to the people to aid. The marsh shall be drained. The people shall be healthy, happy, free. He sees free man treading the fair earth. In working for Humanity ends his long search for the ideal. He claims that as his supreme moment, and sinks in happy death to the blossoming earth he had found a wilderness. Mephistopheles calls up all his demons to clutch the dying man ; but angels pelt the demons with roses. The roses sting them like flames. They depart baffled. No powers of evil can reach the man who has found his ideal and his happiness in the service of Humanity. No demons of pain or remorse can grasp him whose defence is the roses he has evoked from thorns.

Such, then, was the ripe conclusion of Goethe—the master-interpreter of the modern world, who had sounded all the depths and shoals of it: man's life is idealised by his living for others, in the sense of living for those high principles by which others may be raised to order and liberty. Life is idealised by being the organ of ideas. No man can feel his life to be poor or frivolous when he is consecrating it to high human aims. Nor is what he can give poor, however little in the sight of men. It is given to but few to reform empires, but it is the privilege of all to do their best. Our little life begins to shine in that moment when it is directed to a high purpose. But there must be no ambition, no straining to do more than we can. A philosopher observed that his neighbour, a farmer, who went with his waggon to market was extremely anxious not to be cheated, and one day told him that when he became just as anxious not to cheat anybody else, his market waggon would be as noble as the chariot of the sun. And no man has a lot in life too humble if it become ennobled by high principles. If he have honesty and self-respect and independence, let him be content; nobody has anything better.

There is a wise sentence in the otherwise trifling opera of the "Grand Duchess," which says, "If we can't get what we set our hearts on, we must set our hearts on what we can get." If we set true hearts on what is around us, our life will reflect beauty as a violet raises the sod to bear the tint of the sky. The good workman will not quarrel with his tools, if they are the best he can reach. I fear it is a very common error to overlook

attainable resources for the unattainable. Are we making our lives commonplace by not setting our hearts thoroughly upon the reality we have? The proverb says, "Every man thinks his own geese swans;" but it is oftener the other way—people are too apt to think their swans only geese. It is much better to idealise your geese than to despise your swans. And if a man fully appreciates his goose he need not covet any swan whatever.

Now, let us briefly analyse the operation of a warm-hearted devotion to some high cause or truth in making our lives beautiful in our own eyes. It raises our interest above that plane of self-love where most of our wounds are received; it removes our sources of happiness to high regions not to be invaded by the disagreeable details that vulgarise existence. If life seems coarse or ugly it is because we do not see it with sufficient perspective. We are too close to its petty details. How beautiful to the aged appear the days of childhood! What delight in those hours so free from care! What a flower-fringed path through all that green meadow! Ah, there you have perspective. The little worries, the disgraces, the tears of that time are lost in the distance. And if we could only live long enough this time through which we are now passing would appear just so beautiful,—its heaviest cares softened to mere shadings in the distant dream-like picture. I submit that it is a very serious thing we should see the full beauty of our lives only when they are past, or in visions of a possible future. What we most need is to see and feel the beauty and joy of to-day. Does time alone supply the needed perspective? Does length of days alone

unmask the moment whose glory is disguised in a mass of miserable worries? Solomon says No, but wisdom is as gray hairs to those who possess it. Then by what art can we reach a point from which we shall behold life clothed in ideal tints?

Richard Wagner, the composer, has devoted his life and his genius to the work of blending the real and the ideal in a combination of the arts. He has the happy fortune of obtaining the means of accomplishing the utmost that any man can hope for. He built a theatre such as he requires; he had true poetry for his opera as well as true music, and he had the best voices and musicians, and also scenery painted by artists. Now in his effort to enchain his spectators with an illusion, so that they shall be moved by the emotions portrayed, his great difficulty had been to contrive some means of shutting out of sight the mere accidents of his performance,—the incidental means, the small details. How can the audience help looking at the conductor, or admiring the particular scraping of this or that violinist? Or how can they fail to criticise this or that design of the scenery? The artist aims at producing a general effect which shall swallow up all these means and minutiae. And he attained his end by the means devised at Bayreuth. In the first place he entirely concealed his orchestra, so that the music should be as a subtle vapour stealing no one knows whence. In the next place he placed two proscenia—wide and separate spaces—between the stage and the front row of seats, which made the distance seem greater than it really was. The largest of

these he called the "Mystic Gulf," as visibly separating the real from the ideal only to reunite them invisibly. All these were efforts at perspective—musical and scenic—contrived to detach the pure artistic effect from entanglement with its details and machinery. It was an effort to show the flame without its smoke, as far as possible. How wonderful the success, the world now knows. Now why should we not take equal pains for the perfection of life? The details of life must exist, the cares of the day be met; but surely we need not be their victims; they should be ours.

When Christ in his dark hour saw of the travail of his soul and was satisfied, he reduced the crown of thorns to a mere detail. He was not the victim of the cross; it was his victim; he was wrapped up in a great aim which caught up the thorn and the cross, and made them good shades in a grand picture.

The sages teach us that at a certain elevation of the mind in reason and right the littlenesses of life disappear, and its unavoidable troubles diminish. The great aim becomes the centre. It absorbs, more and more, feeling, heart, brain. 'Tis a star that never recedes. What if this man deceives us; some scheme fails; poverty overtakes us? That star will climb on. Truth will not deceive. Reason will not err. No thief will purloin the treasures of thought, nor moth corrupt the purity of love. All the worth laid up there will stay there. Life will grow ideal. Commonplace will become uncommon like the bit of bone or chalk from which a scholar reads a chapter of Nature. Sorrows will change from poisonous

to healing plants, yielding experience. The gay flowers of life—mirth, play, relaxation—will leave the fragrance of wisdom. All this will ensue when life, instead of aiming merely at getting on, at ostentation, and self,—turning to ends what should be means,—becomes so identified with the work of reason and right, that the small round of affairs is illumined by their light, and every reality unfolds its ideal.



XII.

THE ANGEL OF DEATH.





THE ANGEL OF DEATH.

I.

NOT long ago there was some agitation in France concerning the refusal of the authorities to permit military honours to be paid to deceased members of the Legion of Honour, unless they were buried by the Church. A good many of the Legion are Liberals, and they resented this infraction of their rights. The Government had to give way. But, in doing so, the minister said that though many gentlemen had outgrown their belief in the importance of church ceremonials at death, the Government must insist on retaining such ceremonials in the case of the common soldier. For, he said, faith in the future life promised by the Church is the soldier's strength ; he could be trusted for readiness to die only so long as he had perfect faith in immortality. No doubt this frank statement is in part true. Certainly in most of the wars in which French soldiers have been called on to sacrifice themselves, there has been little to sustain them except the faith in immortality. The old saying is, " All that a man hath will he give for his life ; " and they dread death least who believe that they part

with it for paradise, or for what they prize as much as paradise. But nowhere more than in France have been found examples of how men, believing in no future life, may be willing to sacrifice their lives for a cause, which stands to them for paradise. Of all the revolutionists who there have died, from the great French revolution to the Commune, probably not one-third believed in any future life at all. Powerful passions, deep indignation against wrong, moral enthusiasm, have often shown their power to conquer the love of life.

The desire to live is natural and healthy. It is a part of the general preservative force in nature. By natural selection those organisms live longest which are most tenacious of life, and their vitality is inherited cumulatively. But the terror of death is not so easily explained. For it has been just as long the law of nature that men shall die as that they shall live ; and it would seem to be a normal development that the familiar and uniform law of death should be recognised with calmness and, when inevitable, with pleasure.

I believe the horror of death, wherever it exceeds the natural desire to live, has been artificially produced in our nature, and artificially propagated. We have all been moulded by the ages that preceded us, and their notions often survive in our feeling long after they have passed out of our intellects.

Shakspeare has portrayed with tremendous power the fear of death in "Measure for Measure." Young Claudio lies in his dungeon, sentenced to a death from which he can escape only by his sister's dishonour. His own

sister must lay before him the alternatives—his and her dishonour, or his death on the morrow. She would persuade him that “the sense of death is most in apprehension,” but Claudio sighs out “death is a fearful thing.” “And shamed life a hateful,” says Isabel. “Ay,” says Claudio,—

Ay, but to die, and go we know not where ;
To lie in cold obstruction, and to rot ;
This sensible warm motion to become
A kneaded clod ; and the de-lighted spirit
To bathe in fiery floods, or to reside
In thrilling region of thick-ribbed ice ;
To be imprisoned in the viewless winds,
And blown with violence round about
The pendent world ; or to be worse than worst
Of those, that lawless and incertain thoughts
Imagine howling !—’tis too horrible !
The weariest and most loathed worldly life
That age, ache, penury, and imprisonment
Can lay on nature, is a paradise
To what we fear of death.

In all these wild apprehensions of Claudio there is no thought of annihilation. What if he had seen death as an eternal sleep,—no terrors beyond? The same great master has left us his interpretation of what that aspect of death would be :—

To die,—to sleep,—
No more ; and, by a sleep, to say we end
The heartache, and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to,—’tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wished.

Hamlet concludes that all who are in trouble would

seek death were it only sleep, and but for the dread that they may fly from the ills they have to others they know not of. Euripides' Macaria, about to be sacrificed, hopes that death will be an eternal repose. To the natural healthy heart of man there would be no horrors about death in itself. There are painful incidents at which all would shudder,—untimely death, the cutting short of happiness, or the accidents of physical suffering; but if there were no agonies and no apprehensions, the dying would look serenely upon death as a friend leading them to a quiet place where the weary are at rest.

In early ages priests did not find in fear of death a sufficient sanction for their authority. They might have proclaimed immortality for the good and annihilation for the wicked; but apparently they found numbers who preferred annihilation. The largest religions have promised individual absorption in a divine essence (like Brahmanism), or the unconscious bliss of absolute repose (like Buddhism), or the cup of Lethe. Between the distant ages of such simple faith in death and ourselves lie a vast series of hells conjured up to affright mankind with the dread of something beyond death. Between the shade and gentle Lethe other rivers were imagined in which it might suffer long—

Abhorred Styx, the flood of deadly hate;
Sad Acheron of sorrow, black and deep;
Cocytus, named of lamentation loud
Heard on the rueful stream: fierce Phlegethon
Whose waves of torrent fire inflame with rage.

Two other horrors may be named. One is from Egypt,

and has just been deciphered from an old tablet in the British Museum. It is the abode of Nin-ki-gal, the Queen of Death.

To the house men enter, but can not depart from ;
To the road men go—but cannot return.
The abode of darkness and famine,
Where earth is their food,—their nourishment clay.
Light is not seen ; in darkness they dwell
Ghosts like birds flutter their wings there
On the door and the gateposts the dust lies undisturbed.

Now let us turn to the description of the abode of the goddess of death as it was believed by our own more direct ancestors. It is taken from the Edda. "Her hall is called Elvidnir, the region of cold storms : hunger is her table ; starvation her knife ; delay her man ; slowness her maid ; precipice her threshold ; care her bed ; burning anguish her tapestry. One half of her body is flesh, the rest that of a livid corpse."

One can feel certain that the human race could not go on for many ages believing such things as these without their getting pretty deeply engraved upon the general protoplasm.

But when our fathers left that faith it was only to take on another nearly as bad, except that there seemed some chance of final escape. Moreover, it is a comparatively modern opinion that people go at once to hell or heaven after death. All except a few saints went into a limbo very much like that horrid region described on the Egyptian tablet, and got out of it only by slow and costly means. So under Christianity death still remained the King of Terrors. There is a missal at Worms, nearly a thousand

years old, containing a picture of Christ conquering Death. Death is a hideous man, he is prostrate under Christ's feet, he is bound with a chain, the cross is thrust as a spear into his mouth, which vomits flames. Such was the picture that succeeded that contest of Siegfried with the dragon or worm which gave Worms its name. Christianity brought into Europe this type of death—the law of all organized nature. But this fire-breathing death may be traced back to his origin in the Assyrian Angel of Death, Asraël. In the early ages he was by no means conceived of as a monster to be chained, but as the faithful messenger of the gods. The first fables speak of him only as the Inevitable. Thus, when Solomon was conversing with a friend, Asraël passed by and looked fixedly upon the man ; who, seeing it was the Angel of Death, was seized with fear, and asked Solomon to use his magic power and transport him to India. Solomon having done so, Asraël drew near and said, "I was gazing on the man with you in surprise, for I had been ordered to seek him in India." Asraël was believed to mingle death in the cup of those he was to slay, from which came the phrase "to taste of death ;" it was the cup which Jesus prayed might pass from him, and it survives in the memorial chalice of his death.

But gradually under that development of dualism which divided up the universe into two hostile camps—God and Devil—there were imagined two Angels of Death. To Asraël, or as the Rabbis said, Sammaël, was assigned the work of tearing the souls of the wicked painfully from their bodies ; while to Gabriel was assigned the

work of removing the souls of the righteous tenderly. Thus we read in the Koran—

By the angels who tear forth the souls of some with violence,
And by those who draw forth the souls of others with gentleness.

From that came the superstition which has surrounded the death-beds of so-called infidels with fancied horrors. For the original Angel of Death was swiftly identified with Satan, and supposed always to come and claim his own. It is said in the New Testament that to Satan was given the power of death, whereas in the Book of Job, Satan was allowed to do all except touch Job's life. So was gradually built the edifice of superstition crowned at last with the wild delusion that death is the effect of a god's deliberate curse !

Death was thus fairly degraded from an angel to a demon, dwelling in a dark valley,—the valley of the shadow of Death,—that “outer darkness” spoken of by Christ. It seemed hard at first to reconcile this outer darkness with so much fire as Satan was said to use, but it was concluded that this abode was a place where heat and cold alternated—the victims suffering perpetual ague and fever, now seized with shivering and gnashing (chattering) of teeth, and now consumed with heat and begging a drop of water for their parched tongues. These things may seem antiquarian to many, and in one sense they are ; but in an important sense they belong to our own moral constitution. Every one of these various terrors associated with death are reflected in those phantoms which besieged Shakspeare's Claudio in his dungeon. He saw his soul *delighted*—that is unlighted,

darkened, first bathed in fiery floods, then prisoned in thick-ribbed ice. These were common English phantasms but a little time ago, and, although they have been discredited by the intelligent, the impress they left on human nerves still lingers in many a strong man's vague horror of death.

II.

What has been bred into us artificially may be cultivated out of us. The love of life is meant to preserve us just so long as life has more happiness than misery in it. We owe great honour to those reformers and men of science who wage war against the death which mingles its cup in the gin-shop, in the murderous adulterations of food and drink,—cups mingled by the real Asraëls of the land. All honour to those who analyze the air and the water, that mankind may not prematurely taste of death. The combat with disease, pain, and death, is a holy war. It appears that, to some minds, recent discoveries of the laws of heredity have presented a grave problem,—namely, whether medical science is really doing a merciful work in prolonging diseased lives, and thus enabling them to transmit their diseases to others. But it is not so grave a problem as it looks. Undoubtedly the transmission of disease is a very great wrong. There is required a higher morality which will restrain the victims of hereditary disease from defying the plain commands of justice and right. When society devotes to its own affairs more of that zeal which denounces the sins of the stiff-necked in bygone ages, we shall have laws

that shall transfer the ban against certain very proper though unlevitical intermarriages to marriages which involve pain and death to the unborn. Such a law might, indeed, work injustice unless gradually developed through further knowledge ; but it is an error to think that the evil could be mastered by ceasing to prolong invalid lives. It can only be met by a wider diffusion of knowledge concerning the laws of health and of disease, especially the laws of morbid inheritance. When such laws are generally known they will be generally obeyed. Sentiment will follow them. That old law of nature, the survival of the healthiest, though apparently checked by medical science, will recover itself by means of the very knowledge obtained in prolonging life ; and culture will be followed by a natural selection of the healthy. In a perfectly civilised society everybody would die of old age. And when that time comes death will be robbed of its last terror. For to a rational mind—haunted by no fears for the future—the only grief surrounding death is just that painful tearing of the heart away from all its joys which the ancients ascribed to a demon, while the gentle death of old age seemed to them the friendly office of an angel. There is an old story that when Menippus, the cynic, passed by suicide into Hades, he recognised there all the kings by their howling so much louder than the rest. They howled louder, because they had been parted from more earthly treasures than the rest. They who are surrounded by affection, friendship, opportunity, health, have an estate beyond kings, and to such the apprehension of death must bring pain. And so far as

such are concerned it may be said, in passing, that no prayer can be more foolish than that which deprecates "sudden death": such death may seem shocking to priests, who consider their shrivings of importance; but reason justifies the feeling of Cæsar, approved by Bacon, that "the suddenest passage is easiest." Still more at war with human happiness is the miserable priestly plan of inculcating it as a duty to dwell on the thought of death. What could be more cruel than the plan of the Rev. Leigh Richmond—editor of the consumptive theology of sickly shepherds and cottagers—who so complacently describes his custom of collecting the village children in the graveyard to learn spelling and reading from the tombstones!

Yet the average duration of human life is a steadfast consideration in every wise man's life, with reference to which he will build. And it is a problem of vast moment to every individual by what means he shall conquer the traditional influences by which death is shown as his enemy, and turn it into a friendly factor of his work and life on earth. There is something infinitely pathetic in the solution given to this problem by Buddha: let death find you already dead to everything from which it can part you. A sort of slow psychological and passional suicide has, indeed, been proposed by many religions as the means of removing the sting of death. But this is mere evasion of the difficulty, not its solution. Nor is there any solution of it possible except in the utter eradication from the human mind of the accursed superstition that death is a curse, and the entire

dissociation of it from future dangers. As those miserable fictions disappear man will set himself to destroy the incidental evils of death, but will also increasingly recognise death itself as a beautiful provision of Nature.

The popularity of the German engraving "Death, as friend,"—representing the skeleton figure, with scythe laid aside, gently touching the aged man in his sleep,—suggests that people generally may be wiser in this matter than their professional intimidators. The feeling which welcomes death for others when the natural term of life is reached is true and kind. There are those whom we may love as much as ourselves ; but when we see that no further happiness and usefulness await them, we feel that it would be selfish to wish them to totter on while release is near ; and though on their serene saintly faces the tears fall fast, they are out of the sweet depths of memory, not of despair. And if this be so with those who remain, much more is it so to those who depart, for they no longer possess treasures on earth ; their treasures have gone before them. One by one the old friends have departed, insensibly the ties worn thin—then broken—that bound them to earth. Of the garden of joys that once bloomed around them memory alone remains, like the last rose ; and that memory would become pain did not death kindly scatter the petals where the loved ones are sleeping.

Know'st thou not at the fall of the leaf
How the heart feels a languid grief,
Laid on it for covering ;
And how sleep seems a goodly thing,
In Autumn at the fall of the leaf?

And how the swift beat of the brain
Falters because it is in vain,
In Autumn at the fall of the leaf.
Knowest thou not? and how the chief
Of joys seems not to suffer pain?

Knows't thou not at the fall of the leaf
How the soul feels like a dried sheaf,
Bound up at last for harvesting;
And how death seems a comely thing
In Autumn at the fall of the leaf*.

But even when old age is not reached in years it is but too often reached, in all but its serenity, by cares and sufferings. It is not then—it is never—that death deserves the repute of a demon. Rather it should be judged by the frequency with which its presence is recognised by the cessation of pain. When anguish would become intolerable death interposes its relief. Not at the door of the Great Anæsthetic that brings release at last to all pain, must we lay the ignorance and disobedience by which are brought on men the troubles that need the sweet nepenthe. Until mankind have attained that higher civilisation which shall render an untimely death as scandalous as a case of starvation is now, we can only remember that compensations surround the great majority even of seemingly premature deaths. And this not alone because they are generally the result of some congenital weakness,—developed from within or without, as by epidemics,—which would probably make prolonged suffering the alternative of early death; but also because in every grave the sorrows and anxieties are put to sleep

* By D. G. Rossetti. An unpublished poem, which the author kindly permits me to print.

along with the joys. In that final rest how many difficulties are settled, how many cares sink for ever ! Forebodings, misunderstandings, haunting memories of mistake, cannot invade that charmed rest.

There is a soft Lethe flowing through all our life, beside whose still waters we are led that our hearts may be restored. It is fringed with the flowers of forgetfulness ; on its margin the lilies of childhood shine above the wave in which all its mishaps are buried, and youth's meadow is rich where it has wandered, by reason of the poppies it has set on the graves of desire and disappointment. How great is our debt to that daily death—Oblivion ! Let us not fear when the sweet stream from which we so long drank surcease of sorrow widens with us to a shoreless sea.

The influence of the good done does not end with the power to do more, and it is something that the dead cannot live to undo the good they have done. Lord Bacon said he did not fear death, but he would rather not live to go to the funeral of his own reputation. Alas, that is just what befell. But death softens even that tragedy. They who have lived to accomplish any worthy task may solace themselves, even in the presence of untimely death, by seeing that under the shadow of death love reawakens. Their virtue rises more pure from the grave : their faults are sure to be interred with their bones if they have done even a little work worthy to live after them.

David Scott designed a picture of the "Procession of Unknown Powers." A youth, seated on the curve of the

sphere, gazes upon the awful forms that pass by, each bearing a star. To his appealing gaze they return no look : in silent majesty they move on whither their steadfast eyes are bent. As the youth with anxious face looks upward, on the earth beside him a lily has bloomed, and on his shoulder a chrysalid gained its wings. So do they move before us all, these Unknown Powers ; but even of them one thing may be known—they are steadfast to their path and their task. It may be the youth will learn his lesson presently, and turn to attend with equal steadfastness to the flower at his side and the winged creature on his shoulder. It is not by perpetual gazing upon death with its star, still less by shutting out from the heart the ephemeral beauty that blooms beside us, that we can be free from the fear of that inevitable power ; but it is by coaxing from each seed of opportunity its flower, and cherishing each faculty till it find wings. Love can transmute all earthly treasures to eternal life ; so shall they become an imperishable bequest of the dying to the living ; for self cannot desire to carry away the treasures gathered for the sake of love.

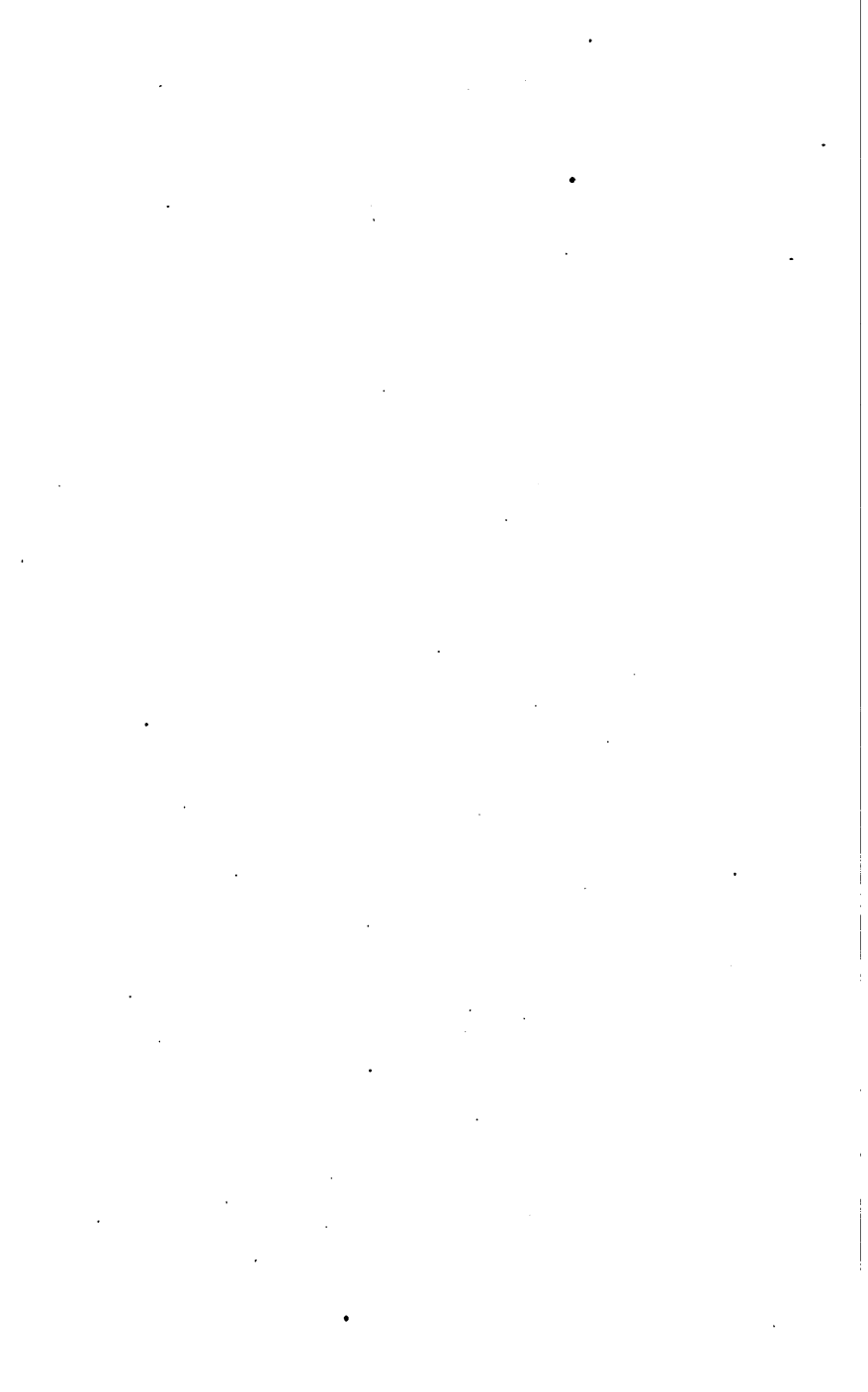
And when that unanswering power, whose name is Death, bears away on its path the lives that are dear, the bereaved may equally derive that same lesson, and turn to make the most of those who remain, tending more carefully the flowers of kindness, removing what thorns they can from the paths of those from whom they must presently be parted.

CHRISTIANITY.

ERRATA.

IN THE ESSAY ON CHRISTIANITY :—

- P. 7, l. 22, strike out 'if not later.'
- P. 11, l. 5, for 'David' 'Abraham.'
- P. 45, l. 9, for 'Christianity' 'Christian.'
- P. 53, l. 26, 'Nicene' refers to the creed, not the place.
- P. 59, l. 25, insert 'Gentile' before 'Bishop.'
- P. 75, l. 10, 'original' before 'Nicene.'
- P. 75, l. 19, for 'Nicene' read 'Athanasian.'
- P. 103, l. 22, refers to Tischendorf's new reading of
Col. ii. 2.



I.

ITS MORNING STAR.



ITS MORNING STAR.

I.

THE homage paid to Christ is a high poetic fact in human history. Even in the Legend of Christ, with all its fables, there are not wanting indications of the profound faith of man in his own higher nature. The poor victim of his own animalism will fain believe that somewhere his nature rose above all that is low and vile. Standing amid physical laws which are as hard walls, the ignorant love to think that at his highest man has been able to master the laws. These are the ideals of ignorant ages which art, science, and culture can alone fulfil. Until nature is recognised as divine there must be a supernature ; and no one will speak lightly of the myths of humanity, even when he may become old enough to regard them as childish things.

Priesthoods have gained power over the people through cunning use of their love for their greatest man. But of course no priesthood can rest upon a man, or on anything within the reach of every mind's comprehension ; so they have made Christ into such a god as is adapted to their

purposes. The manhood of Christ, though it is the one thing about him in which all creeds agree, has so far receded before the Shape bearing his name and contrived in the interests of Christianity, that it is called infidelity to speak of Christ as a man. I have no belief that any man can really be interested in the genius or character of Christ so long as he is still under the impression that the Christian scheme embodies him.* That takes him out of the region of human interest, whatever interest of another kind it may enlist. It is one of the greatest privileges of freethinkers that they can study with that calmness which is essential to research, and which is impossible where other aims than to find the fact intervene, the lives of those great men who

* As a rule I prefer the title "Christ," to that of "Jesus," for we cannot be certain that the latter, said to have been the name assigned by the angel, was really bestowed by his parents in childhood. The instinct of Catholic and Ritualist recognises "Jesu" as the more superstitious name. Even if "Jesus" were the original name, it seems to me less characteristic than the title which signs the verdict of the people on the man after his work was done. "Christ" is also a Gentile word, and better symbolises the effect of a life and teaching which broke down the wall of partition between Jew and Gentile, and advanced so far the religion of humanity. Finally, the oriental custom by which nearly all great religious teachers became known in history by other than their family names, reflects in this instance especial honour on human nature to which it is entitled. Those who most distrust the people have never forgotten that they cried "Give us Barabbas instead of him," and we who think of the masses with hope must not forget that when and where the people could give their suffrage free of priestly demagoguism, they voted the same man their King, above all the Cæsars. For "Christ" represents no priestly but a royal title, which Jew and Gentile united to bestow on a poor man whose only claim to kingship was that he bore witness to the truth.

have been the objects of superstitious veneration. No prejudice, no compulsory creed, no fear of the results of inquiry, can prevent our seeking and stating the simple truth.

Jesus, agree all the sects, was a man. They add that he was more—though what they append generally would make him less—than a man. We must pardon the speculation, since so few know what a man is. But it is just that we are all seeking to know, what a man really is ; and nothing can better aid us than to learn from the great manifestations of our humanity in such men as Jesus. Let us then inquire what manner of man he really was.

II.

The only materials we have for our inquiry are those supplied by the Four Gospels, with now and then a hint from the Epistles of Paul. From these we must deduct all that can be shown to have been written for a theoretical purpose, or in the interest of any party, school, or sect.

Thus, we can get but little that is descriptive of the real Christ from such a work as that called "The Gospel according to John." In the first place it is a very late work, belonging to the latter part of the second century, if not later. Its scholastic style of Greek, its frequent ignorance of local usages and places, and neglect of notorious Jewish traditions concerning Christ—whose birth, baptism, and temptation are in it utterly ignored—indicate the passage of the legend into a new habitat. In the anxiety to present a superhuman being all earthly

aspects are eliminated. There are also traces in this Gospel of controversies which were unknown within four generations after Christ's death. Thus (John viii., 44) Christ is represented as saying of the Devil, "he is a liar and so is his father." Though the English version has tried to cover the meaning by turning the sentence into bad grammar and worse sense ("a liar and the father of it") the original is plain : *ψεύστης ἐστὶ, καὶ ὁ πατὴρ αὐτοῦ*. Now this notion that the Devil had a father was one of the later phases of the Gnostic philosophy. The Demiurge, employed to create the world and then setting up a rival kingdom, was for the first time associated with the Devil, and suggested as his creator, by Marcion, who taught in Rome during the middle of the second century. In other sentences ascribed to Christ the Marcionite idea of an "antithesis"—the demiurgic confronting the divine kingdom—is reflected, but here it reaches the later Archonitic development, the Devil being named as the Son of the Evil Creator (as Christ is of the Good God). This conception, which Augustine denounces as Manichæan, could only have been stated late in the second century.

But apart from the late date of the fourth gospel, the writer of it is so absorbed in his main theoretical purpose,—that of making Christ the point of union between the Hebrew personification of Wisdom and the Greek conception of the Logos,—that he does not hesitate to sacrifice everything, even the moral character of Christ, to his end. He represents Christ as attitudinising at the grave of Lazarus. "Jesus wept"; but could those have been

genuine tears of sorrow at the death of a man whom he knows he can resuscitate by a word? Then he raises his eyes and says "Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me." And he adds, "I said that because of the people, that they may believe thou hast sent me; I know that thou hearest me always"—an "aside," confessing that his thanks were meant for effect. This is only a fair example of how Christ is uniformly adapted to a theory in the fourth gospel.

It is indeed enough that it entirely omits the Sermon on the Mount! The homely every-day virtues of that sermon were too human, too commonplace, to arrest the attention of a speculative enthusiast absorbed in the tremendous work of remodelling the theosophic schools of Egypt and Greece, harmonising their divisions, and solving the problems of ages. Nevertheless, in another direction, this gospel, however untrustworthy for personal portraiture of Christ, is of the highest importance by reason of the spirit of love which it consecrates. It is the very apotheosis of Love. God is Love. Christ is Love. To love is the only test, the only creed, the perfect life. So magnificent is this rapture of love that breathes through the gospel which, no doubt because of it, was inscribed with the name of the disciple called "Beloved," that the warring Jew and Gentile sects seem to have had to touch it here and there in the interest of what they deemed orthodoxy. Thus in the noble utterance ascribed to Christ, speaking to the Samaritan woman, that neither in her sacred mountain nor yet at Jerusalem should the true worshippers gather, but everywhere should they worship

in spirit and in truth, a Jewish sectarian has interpolated the words "ye (Samaritans) know not whom ye worship ; we know whom we worship, for salvation is of the Jews,"—and this bit of bigotry remains there like an insect in translucent amber.

III.

For our main facts we proceed to what are called the Synoptical Gospels. Of these we may set aside Mark except for occasional correction of the other two, because it is an evident compilation from them. Now these two Gospels, Matthew and Luke, portray a Christ totally distinct from the mystical Christ of John ; and yet their disagreement from each other is very significant, showing very plainly that both are warped—one by a theological, the other by a polemical purpose—even when recording the same facts or traditions. To discover how far the portrait of Christ presented by either was influenced or tinged by the writer's prejudices, we must for the moment dismiss from our consideration the truth or falsity of the narratives, and think only of the colouring given to them.

Taking Luke first, we find pervading his work a jealousy of the Jews. It is well known that the believers in Christ, from the first generation after his death, were sharply divided into two parties,—one wishing to preserve the supremacy of Judaism in the new religion the other determined that the Gentiles should have an equal or superior part in it. Now Luke presses everything in favour of the Gentiles. The writer addresses

his work to a Gentile, Theophilus, and begins by admitting that he was not an eye-witness, but had carefully searched into the traditions transmitted from those who were. At the outset we find Luke tracing the genealogy of Christ beyond Hebrew kings, beyond David where Matthew leaves him, back to Adam,—that is, to the father of all races, Gentiles equally with Jews. And Adam, he says, was the son of God.

I cannot, at present, go exhaustively into this subject, but will present some of the more salient instances in which the Gentile animus of Luke is shown.* Matthew relates an incident in which Christ is represented as at first refusing the petition of a woman because she was an alien, but afterwards granting it because she humbled herself before the chosen race. "Behold a woman of Canaan came out from those borders, and cried, saying, Have mercy on me Lord, son of David : my daughter is grievously possessed with a demon. But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came to him saying, Send her away ; for she cries after us. He said, I was not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And she came and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me. But he answered and said, It is not lawful to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs. But she said, Yea, Lord ; for even the dogs eat of the crumbs which

* An admirable series of articles on this general subject, which I hope may at some time be reprinted, were contributed by the Rev. O. B. Frothingham to the "Dial," a magazine edited by myself in Cincinnati, in 1860.

fall from their masters' table. Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith; be it unto thee as thou wilt." This is Matthew's account. Mark represents Christ as following the woman's abject words, speaking of her race as dogs, with "for this saying go thy way: the demon is gone out of thy daughter." Now Luke omits this story altogether; but he replies to its insult to the Gentile race, when making up the genealogy of Christ, by giving him two Cainans among his ancestors. This Cainan number two is found nowhere in the Old or New Testaments except in Luke, where it stands as an intensification, grown to a serious claim, that the despised race of aliens, whom the Jews conquered and despised, nevertheless contributed a double supply of blood to the veins of their Messiah.

Luke also omits the charge to the disciples (Matt. x, 5): "Go not into a way of Gentiles, and into a city of Samaritans enter not; but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." On the other hand Luke replies to this with a story (ix, 52), unknown in Matthew, of how Christ himself sent his disciples—and he is careful to add seventy to the twelve—into a Samaritan village, where the people would not receive them because they were on their way to Jerusalem, and how, when they wished to call down fire upon the villagers, Christ rebuked them. Luke also has the parable of the good Samaritan,—where the type of charity is chosen from a despised alien tribe,—which Matthew has not. On an occasion when Christ finds unbelief in his own village, he says, "A prophet is not without honour, but in his own country

and in his own house." With Matthew that is all. But Luke makes this the very opening of Christ's ministry, and the occasion of a great manifesto against the Jews and in favour of aliens. According to him Christ's rebuke does not include "his own house," but is national: "No prophet is acceptable in his own country. But I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when a great famine came upon all the land; and unto none of them was Elijah sent save unto Sarepta of Sidonia, unto a widow. And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, save Naaman, the Syrian." This bold exaltation of foreigners was followed, according to Luke, by an attempt on Christ's life, which he escaped mysteriously,—"passing through the midst of them." That was a cutting satire on the Jewish party.

It is evident from this last phrase which seems to ascribe to Christ the power of rendering himself invisible, and others of the same character, that in Luke there is a transitional conception of Jesus,—a germinating Arianism. Luke cares little if at all for the Messianic idea. Where Matthew reports the people crying, "Hosanna to the Son of David," Luke says they cried "Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord!" Luke i, 35) even interprets the venerable title "Son of God" as meaning simply that the Holy Ghost was his father. He is plainly representing Christ as a sort of demigod. It is remarkable that he alone gives the salutation of the angel to Mary, and it is nearly in the very words of the seer

Tiresias to the mother of Hercules,—“Be of good cheer, thou mother of a noble offspring : blessed art thou among Argive women.”

We therefore must read Luke with caution, because of his polemical attitude towards the Jews, and because of a slight speculative tendency in the direction of Greek superstitions.

IV.

But how about Matthew? We find in Matthew, as I think, the most primitive conception of Christ, and probably the least biassed report of what was really said and done by him. But this first gospel is also vitiated by a prepossession on the part of the writer. In his firm belief that Jesus is the Messiah of the Jews he tries to make nearly every word and action of his fulfil a prophecy. And there is reason to believe that in some cases he unconsciously stretches Christ's words and recasts his actions in his desire to show him to the Jews as fulfilling all the so-called predictions of the conditions under which the Messiah was to appear and the part he was to enact. Thus he transports the family of Joseph and Mary from Bethlehem to Nazareth for no better reason than the apparent fulfilment of a declaration in the Old Testament that somebody, whom he supposes to be the Messiah, would be “called a Nazarene.” It is a blunder which shows the author to have been a judaizing Egyptian-Greek convert. For the passages alluded to (Judges xiii, 5, 1 Sam. i, 11) speak of “Nazarite,” one set apart (from *nazar*, to separate) according to Jewish law, and have

no reference to the village of Nazareth. In reporting (Matt. xii, 38) Christ's vigorous rebuke of those who demanded "a sign," in which he says no sign shall be given but that of the prophet Jonah, the writer of the first Gospel at once seizes another opportunity for showing a correspondence between Christ and a Jewish type, and makes the teacher add : "for as Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so will the son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." Christ could not of course have known anything of the legend of his resurrection which was to arise after his death ; and, if he made any allusion to Jonah at all—and Mark reports the remark without it—it could only have been in the simple way mentioned in the third gospel, that as Jonah warned Nineveh he warned his generation. The gospel of Matthew carries its hebraism to an extreme in its fanciful account of Christ's entry into Jerusalem, where he is actually represented as riding on two animals at once—an ass and a colt—because the prophecy had said "Thy king comes unto thee, meek, and mounted upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass ;" the writer not knowing enough of the Hebrew idiom to perceive that only one animal was meant by Zechariah,—"an ass, even the foal of an ass."

Taking, then, these two gospels—Matthew and Luke—divesting them of their mythology, their improbabilities, and glosses, we are left as best we can to build up for ourselves a probable picture of Christ and some idea of his life and teachings.

V.

In the posthumous work of the late Lord Amberley, "An Analysis of Religious Belief"—a work which, however incomplete, is so full of information that it must awaken in us all fresh regret at its author's untimely death—he lays down a rule which I think is likely to mislead, even though he qualifies it. It is "that wherever we can perceive faults or blemishes in the character of Christ, we may presume them to have actually existed; for his biographers were deeply interested in making him appear perfect, and they would have been anxious, wherever possible, to conceal his weaknesses." He adds that this principle must be qualified by the consideration that they might have failed to recognise the faultiness, or may have misunderstood him. A perusal of the gospels leads me to the belief that wherever such blemishes are recorded they are generally, if not invariably, expressions of the bigotry, superstition, or partisan feeling of the writers, and that the general high tenour of Christ's mind and character should lead us to give him the benefit of every doubt, and ascribe the fault rather to his reporters than to himself.

Another thing should be said. Because we reject miracles and legends, in themselves, it does not follow that we must reject all the statements wrapped up in them. We must remember that valuable ores are contained in dross. Nay, the dross itself may be characteristic of ores to which it is related.

This last maxim is of especial value when we consider

such legends as those relating to the birth and infancy of Christ. When a man has become famous it is natural that inquiries should be instituted about his family and his childhood; and though, in such a case as that of Christ, it is inevitable that a swarm of legends should surround the facts, they may nevertheless hint the truth. Thus it would be very difficult to get up a tradition that a man was born a poor peasant, when his family connection was well known in its own neighbourhood to be of wealth and rank. The traditions would point to the notorious fact. There is, therefore, no reason why we should doubt the indications of the legend in Luke that Christ was born of parents in good position. If the traditions occurred only in Matthew we might suspect he was trying to make out Christ's relationship to royalty; but Luke shows no interest in Christ's connection with David. The sign named to the shepherds by which they should recognise the babe was that he would be found wrapped in swaddling clothes,—a mark, as Calmet noted, of dignity. We are particularly told that Christ's birth in the stable was only because the inn was full. There would appear to be no reason why Joseph should have taken Mary, so near to her confinement, with him to Bethlehem to be enrolled or taxed under the imperial edict, unless she was possessed of some property requiring her personal presence. It is a family which seems to have leisure to travel even as far as Egypt on their own beasts of burthen. In Matthew he is, by our translation, represented as the son of a carpenter; but the word is *τεκτων*, which may be either a builder or a

carver in wood, and in any case does not in the least mean that Christ was of low position.

The probabilities are that Paul stated a well-known fact when he said that Christ, though rich, for the sake of the people became poor. His discourses all show him to have been a man of education, and his conduct is marked by refinement. When he enters the synagogue, even when a boy, the minister gives him the scriptures that he may read to the assembly. And it is probable that the startling effect produced upon the mind of the half-clad popular prophet John, when Jesus came and asked to be baptised, was the high rank of his new convert. "What," he cries, "you come to me! to a man unworthy (by position) to tie your shoes!" Of course, we cannot be sure this was John's meaning, but we can be certain that no coarse or illiterate man ever uttered the sermon on the Mount. Like many other great teachers and radicals,—like Buddha, Zoroaster, Confucius, Mohammed, Plato, in the past, and like Knox, Wesley, Wilberforce, Swedenborg, Saint Simon, in more modern times,—Christ would appear to have been a highly-educated and well-connected young radical and enthusiast, who at first aimed to reform the religion of his country, and, that being too strong for him, fought it unto death.

VI.

That this youth was a convert under the preaching of the great revivalist of the time, John the Baptist, seems

to me plain. Although the writers of the Gospels manifest a suspicious anxiety to turn John and his preaching into a mere preface to Christ and his movement, we know from other sources that the wild half-clad prophet in the wilderness had awakened a wide-spread excitement, and it still survives in some Eastern sects, which care little for Christ, and claim John as their founder. Under the Roman occupation of the country, it is probable that a diversion of popular feeling had occurred, and the people in their hatred of the foreigner had sunk into the torpor of indifference as to their intimate religious affairs, under which priestly oppressions and hypocrisies had grown rank. John came laying his axe at the root of this baleful tree. He turned the popular mind again upon the need of religious reform at home, and directed against the priesthood the animosities which had been gathering against Rome. He called men to alliance with the Kingdom of Heaven, and in the mouth of an Essene, as he probably was, that meant something like the early Puritan movement was in England. By its Essene wing Judaism was already in connection with Egypt, and some other foreign regions; and the greater universality of John's revival is indicated by his adopting for all converts the symbol of purification by water which, under the old law, was used only for proselytes from alien tribes. This already implied the moral kingdom under which Jew and Gentile were included. And this meant a new "cause" and a great agitation, which were sure to bring their adherents into collision with the priesthood. "Presume not any more," cried John, "to say within

yourselves, We have Abraham for our father." He denounces the Pharisees as a brood of vipers.

Now when Jesus was baptised by John, he adopted this new cause. He talked in the same vein. "From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." He also called the Pharisees a "brood of vipers." Some rationalising Christians maintain that Jesus was simply a gentle and good teacher, who went about inculcating a beautiful morality. But it is plain that he was, with John, warrior in a revolutionary cause. It is this fact which explains his demand for a personal following, which has led some to charge him with egotism. It was not to a personal discipleship that he called men when he said, "Come, and follow me," but the word of a captain enlisting soldiers for a struggle. Men and women might be gentle and pure in their homes; but in such an emergency that would not fulfil the need of the hour; they must come out and stand by the hated outcast battling for truth and right, and thereby prove their fidelity to the Kingdom of God. Lord Bacon has remarked that when Christ told the young man that if he would be perfect he should give away his possessions and come follow him, he did not say he should give them away unless he was so prepared to devote himself absolutely to the new cause. He did not lord it over the young man's conscience, but acknowledged that a good life might be lived by obedience to the moral laws; though the perfect life could be attained only by entire self-consecration to the great cause of truth, and sharing its perils and hardships. Incidentally there is

reflected in the absoluteness of the demand the singular extent of Christ's idealism, which disregarded the usual appliances of success—wealth and rank—and trusted only in the pure power of Truth, and the enthusiasm of its adherents.

That, like Wesley and most other reformers, Christ at first tried to work through the existing religious institutions is probable: the traditions of his early preaching in synagogues are clear. They may have been ultimately closed against him, or the crowds may have swelled so that he could only address them out of doors. We know very little of the mental phases and struggles through which he passed in the thirty years preceding his public consecration by baptism to the new kingdom preached by John. But after that he speaks as one who feels himself member of a new society, and by no means realises the full extent and bearing of the revolution he has espoused. He has rebelled against his class, and taken his place with the humblest religious community which boasted of the poverty of their prophet, whose food was wild honey and his dress a leathern girdle.

Christ is impatient of anything inharmonious with the equality and democracy of the fraternity he has entered. It is curious to peruse the laborious pedigrees by which the gospels try to connect him with royalty, and the homage afterwards paid by the church to his mother beside the records of his own repudiation of such things. They tell him his mother and brothers stand outside and wish to speak to him; but he points to his followers, and will acknowledge only them as mother and brothers,

"Blessed is the womb that bare thee!" cries a woman; but, with the like impatience, he exclaims—"No! blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it." There is a strong infusion of the Essene communism in this, and there are not wanting various early (as I think) utterances disparaging marriage, in which the celibacy favoured by that society is reflected.

But this could have only been transitional with him. "At last he beat his music out"—and great music it was. He was no ascetic against whom it was urged, "This man receiveth sinners and eateth with them." He was no Essene who wove bridal-feasts into parables; nor was he wanting in sensibility or filial feeling who took children in his arms, was loved and followed by women, and in his last agony asked John to be as a son to his mother.

VII.

The real beauty of Christ's life is just that which is hid by the blind ascription of equal sanctity to all he did and said,—his growth. Slight as the authentic points are, they are points of fire. We see him steadily emerging from sectarian trammels and national prejudices: the smoke of Jewish tradition—Gehenna, devils, angels,—mingling with but never mastering the ever-mounting flame of his thought. It is a Jewish Messiah he sees coming in clouds of glory, but the messianic costume is thrown off when, descended, the judge says nought of Jew or Gentile, but parts to right and left men, as they have or have not fed the hungry and clothed the naked.

The hereditary conventional beliefs in his mind decrease until they linger only as superficial garb of his truth : he never makes any prevailing error his main point. It appears to me that some liberals concede too much to that Medusa, Superstition, which turns every thought and emotion of Christ to dogmatic stone, when they admit his responsibility for the demonology, the devil, the eternal hell, incidentally mentioned without denial in his teachings. Under compulsion to fulfil the rôle of the Messiah, the Christ of Christendom is made to give an original and divine sanction to the cosmological notions of his age, which he held as we hold the law of gravitation. The demonology, the great gulf fixed between heaven and hell, were the best science of his age ; the Darwins and Huxleys of his time, such as they were, believed them : he was not a dialectical or scientific sceptic engaged in questioning such things. In estimating a great man we should surely look to that wherein he was unique, individual, exceeded his age and added to it. In raising to equal import Christ's mere hereditary mode of expression and the life that was in him—adoring alike body and raiment—the sects are really building as much upon the creed of Christ's crucifiers as on his own ! Every Scribe and Pharisee agreed with Christ about Gehenna and Satan. It was not for such views they put him to death. It is to complete their murderous work only too faithfully that the dead Christ should be dragged through the world at the chariot-wheels of that very Messiah-theory which slew him. What Scribe and Pharisee did not believe was in a Father who sends his

sunshine and rain on good and evil alike, a Father, we may deduce at length, not likely at any time to rain fires of hell upon his children ! What shall be said of those who attribute, to the man who believed in such a Father, an equally conscious and thought-out agreement with the logical results of the conventional cosmogony which was sometimes the inevitable costume of his thought ?

Especially is it interesting to note how from basing his opposition to falsities on the written Law, he more and more appeals to nature and reason. David's eating the shew-bread and man's superiority to the Sabbath are oddly connected for a time ; but at length his protest against the Sabbath is based simply upon unresting nature and human liberty.

For his age and country Christ was, perhaps, unique in his method of measuring usage and tradition by real principles. When he warned the youth to keep the commandments, and the young man asks *which*, he does not blindly reply "The whole ten, of course ;" he names only five from the decalogue,—all the real and human ones ; names none of those that protect Jehovah. For the Sabbatarian command he substitutes "Love thy neighbour as thyself ;" instead of warning the youth against "graven images," which he is in no danger of worshipping, he touches his real idol—his wealth ; and instead of exhorting him to do the work of Moses' time, he calls him to the great task of his own—to come out there into the street, stand by his side, and toil for the right. How far he carried this rationalism we cannot fully know, for his words come to us mingled with much that is irrational in

his reporters: nevertheless, to the careful eye, his pearl will not be confused with the shell enclosing it. We know that it was a great soul, far above any New Testament writer, which sends us those fine protests against prayer in public places, that relegation of the heart to the closet for its mystical communion with the Highest. Not one of those believers in popular marvels who report him could have invented those exalted poetic interpretations of nature which bid us learn of the sparrow and of the lily, more glorious than Solomon in his splendour, and appealed to men to discern the signs of their own time as for the weather they watched the morning red and glow of evening. It was no believer in a fictitious providence who rebuked the notion that those on whom the tower of Siloam fell were worse than others. And among the few things which, even in the fourth gospel, we can trace back only to him, is that wonderful saying that he will not pray for his disciples, because God needs no prompting of his love; and also that lesson of humility taught by his washing the feet of the humble working men who followed him. These things represent the integrity of a great mind,—the mind of a thinker, a reasoner, a poet. Critics sometimes charge rationalists who believe in the greatness of Christ with selecting from the gospels all that is favourable, and discrediting all that is unfavourable to him. But for one I repudiate that charge. I see plainly that there are some words and actions ascribed to Christ which are inferior to others, while they are in some cases equally authentic. But, believing that Christ was a man, I believe that he grew, and it is our duty to estimate him at his

highest, and not at his lowest. I would not, in my humble concerns, like to have what I said as an orthodox preacher quoted against what I believe now. We are entitled in accordance with the laws of human evolution to claim that the Judaic or superstitious utterances of Christ represent a more youthful period of his life than those which are in plain contradiction of them. Thus he says, "The Scribes and Pharisees sat in Moses' seat : all things, therefore, whatsoever they bid you, do and keep ; but do not ye after their works : for they say and do not." Now I say that is the attitude of a youth in transition,—and why? Because at another time he does what those occupants of Moses' seat tell him not to do, and repudiates them on principle. They tell him to keep the Sabbath : but he—casting, no doubt, a look on ever-active Nature around him—replies, "My Father ceases not his work on the Sabbath, nor do I."

Christ's attention was naturally first arrested by the corruptions with which the priesthood had invested the ancient religion. He felt the grandeur that lay in that old religion, and supposed that all it required was purification from later corruptions. It is possible that in the ardour of this early aim he might have made the violent attack on the tradesmen in the temple ascribed to him. He denounces the priests for their hypocritical evasions of the Mosaic Law. He finds them appending to the command "Honour thy father and mother" a technical escape from its penalty, which was "He that curses father or mother, let him die the death." His attention not yet turned to the law itself he attacks only their evasion :—

"But ye say, Whosoever shall say to the father or the mother, Be that an offering whatsoever thou mightest have been profited by me, he need not honour his father or mother." That is, a man might purchase an indulgence for not supporting his parents by paying a sum of money into the temple. But it is certain Christ did not continue to believe that the established church of his country could be so purified or expanded as to answer the needs of mankind or represent his ideal. The time came when the conviction was forced upon him that of all that edifice not one stone should be left upon another. Not without pangs was the transition completed. Those who have known what it is to wrestle with doubts and misgivings, who have known what it is to break the ties of love and friendship in order to follow truth and right, can best hear all the pathos of that lamentation that comes across the ages, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, that killest the prophets and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings, and ye would not. Behold your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord." The next sentence is significant: "And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple." That was just such a heart-broken man abandoning finally and for ever the orthodox religion of his time, as you, my friend, may have known in your pilgrimage.

VIII.

The question has long been discussed whether Christ

believed himself to be the Messiah of Jewish prophecy and hope. It is a very difficult question to determine because of the conflicting theories of the New Testament writers which so variously colour what he said. However, my belief is that in this also his mind passed through several phases of belief. At the time when Christ appeared the ancient Jewish belief in the Coming Man had not only been intensified by their subjugation, but modified: they no more looked for the righteous Prince of Peace leading in the Golden Age, but for a warrior overthrowing the power of Rome. All the more, as the possibility of successful resistance by natural or military means vanished, had they come to rest on the hope of divine interposition in their behalf. Exasperated and universal as that feeling was we could not expect any ardent Jewish youth to grow up without sharing it. Such was the popular state of mind that no prophet or reformer could arise without shaping his reform with reference to the messianic idea. Theudas, Judas, Bar-kochab, and other agitators had appeared, pretended to be the Messiah, and fallen ignominiously when they could not sustain the pretension. John the Baptist escaped the ordeal by confessing that he was only the forerunner of the Messiah. As for a long time every religious radical in Christendom—Fox, Wesley, Swedenborg, Channing—have all shown eagerness to declare their faith the most genuine Christianity, so it was felt as a necessity that every Jewish innovator should prove that he was setting up the only true and genuine Messiaship. This expected kingdom might be conceived variously, but it always

involved the supremacy of the Jews over all other nations, The enlightened Jews have long given up that notion but it survives among Christian bibliolaters, and among some Jewish tribes singular recurrences of the belief are not infrequent, which show the nature of the superstition. Thus in that valuable London paper, "The Jewish World" (September 15, 1876), it is related that Ahmed Eyub Pasha, commanding an expedition against the revolted Beni Haschid tribes, was confronted by a Jewish teacher named Suleiman Ishaki, who claimed to be the Messiah, and aimed to establish a kingdom of Jews in South Arabia with himself as Prince. The Turkish governor has thrown this Messiah and his followers into prison at Mariba, where Ishaki now remains.

This idea of claiming Messiahship seems to have been thrust upon Christ by his friends. After his baptism he went about repeating the words of John, "the kingdom of heaven is at hand," without any intimation that he had a special part to play in that kingdom. But John the Baptist sees him and cries, "Behold the man;" disciple after disciple cries, "Thou art the Christ;" voices in the crowd take it up and proclaim him "Son of God," "Son of David;" until he himself seems to have been mystified, and one day asked his personal friends who they and others thought he really was. And when the affirmation came that he was the Messiah, Son of the living God, he begged they would not mention that to anybody. In the synoptical gospels Christ never calls himself "Son of God," and it is probable that in the old phrase "Son of Man" he found the more rational and

liberal side of the messianic idea which he temporarily adopted. In one case he uses it nearly as we should now use the word Humanity: "The Sabbath is made for man, not man for the Sabbath. The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath." That is, Man is master of the Sabbath.

The repeated desire expressed by Christ that his personal followers should not proclaim him to be the Messiah, but even keep secret their faith, is curious. Plainly he had no personal ambition in the matter. If he really believed himself the Messiah for whose advent his nation looked his injunction would be something as if a politician, trying to be elected President or Premier, should conceal the fact that he was a candidate. It is not impossible that in the early days of his agitation he canvassed among his friends in private the possibilities of a political movement, and, as a poetic radical sometimes does now, dreamed of a reformed world in which the poor working men around him should rise to power with their oppressors at their feet. But it is more certain that the messianic idea was gradually translated into the larger spirit of his mind, and merged in his final conception of a regenerate Humanity. Utterly inconsistent with any existing theory of the Messiah was his announcement of a kingdom that was to come without its being observed, a kingdom within, or, if we accept another sense, "in the midst of" his disciples. No Jew would have recognised as messianic a kingdom not of this world—even in Christ's sense of its being moral and spiritual. Nothing could then have been more anti-messianic to a Jew than that in response to his cry for a national leader one

should start forward with a proclamation of an invisible kingdom, made up of meek and lowly non-resistants ! The Bishop of Manchester declares that Jesus was the great secularist of his time, and that by his phrase " Kingdom of Heaven " (or " of God ") he by no means meant any region beyond the grave, but a new moral order in the earth, and in the present. For once I can agree with a Bishop. He pointed his comrades to the harvest white before them, warned them against thinking too much of the morrow, and was impatient of all talk of a Messiah to come, and a kingdom shaped after the patriarchal fashion. John the Baptist was Elias enough, and the Messiah was already with them, if they were so far liberated from tradition as to see him in a poor out-cast minister of truth, and were not like the rest looking for a mighty Captain and Prince, in purple and gold, with mailed hand uplifted against Cæsar.

We must especially guard ourselves from adopting too readily the terms of a report made in the interest of a theory, and so likely to turn any spontaneous utterance of a fervent and private moment into an official document. Thus when Peter says (Matt. xvi, 16) " Thou art the Christ," it is probable Christ thought of his lowliness rather than of his grandeur as he exclaimed " Blessed art thou, Simon, for flesh and blood hath not revealed this to thee, but my Father in heaven." The priestly perversion which represents Christ as then and there founding a Church, with Peter for its pope, may well admonish us how cold the warm words of that great heart had become in the days of ecclesiastical strife amid which the tradi-

tions concerning Christ were "revised in the interest of the orthodox faith," as the prelates naïvely confess. It is more probable that Jesus was simply touched by the fact of a poor working-man turning from all the proud ambitious notions of his race to recognise the Son of God in a man who had not where to lay his head, simply for the truth that was in him. Nor were there wanting some who, long after, confronted the pomp and power of the world with the superior greatness of a rejected and crucified teacher who bore the secret of God in his breast. They cried "Who is he that overcometh the world but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God!" That man had seen through all the tinsel that decorated the seeming favourites of heaven, he had overcome the world, who could fix, not on Cæsar in his purple but on Jesus in his poverty, as the real king of men and beloved of God. The centuries, rolling on, have reversed all this. We may now ask, "Who is he that yields to the world but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" That man swims with the current. Were Jesus in Christendom, and heard one name him the Messiah, he could no longer say the compliment came not of flesh and blood; but to any one amid the crowd who should say "Thou art a man,—a right and true man, than whom none do I love more," his hand Christ must surely clasp, and say, "Blessed art thou, my brother! Flesh and blood did not tell you that, neither conventional opinion, nor priest, nor your own interest; but the spirit of truth, and patient thought. Blessed art thou!"

IX.

Christ's pacific teachings, the unobservable interior kingdom he announced, his rebuke of those who look here and there, prove that he had advanced not only beyond the creed and ritual of the synagogue, but beyond the conceit and political narrowness of his nation. Dr. Furness, who has studied the life of Jesus as thoroughly and sympathetically as any living man, has suggested that the spirit of submission was taught by Christ with some reference to the condition of his country. "Accounting themselves the chosen of Heaven, and all other nations but as dogs in comparison, they were stung to the quick by the humiliating consciousness of national subjection. They thirsted for vengeance upon their Gentile masters, and indulged in the wildest dreams of temporal prosperity. It was the proud fierce temper of the nation, causing it to chafe against the Roman authority, that was sure to bring on a collision with that mighty power by which it would be ground to powder. This Jesus plainly foresaw. To his prophetic vision the magnificent Temple in Jerusalem was to become a ruin, not one stone left upon another. The only salvation of the people, collectively and personally, was in a temper directly the reverse, in a spirit of patience which no suffering nor injuries could exhaust, and in a humanity that acknowledged an example to be followed in the despised Samaritan."*

* Jesus. By W. H. Furness. Philadelphia : Lippincott. 1871. To this and other works of my dear friend and honoured teacher, as well as to his conversation, my debt has grown with time and is larger than I can compute.

And it is just here that the testimony of Paul becomes valuable. Paul knows nothing of Christ as a thaumaturgist; he transmits to us the moral portrait of a man characterized by "gentleness" and "simplicity," and one who believed that it is more blessed to give than to receive. But it is a still more important thing that Paul, who, above all other witnesses, bore impress of Christ fresh upon him, should have instantly consecrated himself to the work of uniting Jew and Gentile. The very keynote of Christ's Gospel was to Paul that which he declared to the nations:—Christ has broken down the dividing wall between Jew and Gentile, slain their enmity, made their peace, and spiritually united the sundered races into "a new man," having access by one spirit to the one Father. This is the Gospel which Paul declares he received from Christ, and I cannot doubt that it represents the last teachings of Jesus in Jerusalem.

But that, again, was by no means the voice of a Jewish Messiah. Such indifferentism as between Jew and Gentile might naturally have evoked from Roman Pilate the words "I find no fault in the man," but to the priesthood it meant utter ruin. It was the reversal of the whole Jewish history. It was as if, in Elijah's time, a Jew had started up to affirm that Baal was equal to Jehovah, and both destined to be superseded by a higher deity. It meant that presently a Paul should be preaching on Mars Hill with texts taken from Greek altars and poets. The Jewish priesthood was nothing if not supreme over all others, and their fundamental claim was that the gods of the nations were idols.

Thus, then, the chief burden of Paul's ministry was the downfall of that tree at whose root John the Baptist had laid the axe ; and between John and Paul stands Christ, whose life, genius, and martyrdom had made that consummation possible, and who from the messianic stem of Israel had flowered into a prophet of Humanity.

X.

To two great ideas, both fatal to a priesthood, Christ fell a martyr. He was not put to death because of his beautiful moral teachings or his pure life. There was nothing novel in his moral teachings : his precepts can all be found in Talmudic and other scriptures existing before his time, albeit stated by him far more felicitously and simplified for the popular comprehension, and his high morality was no more original than the sunshine. His fatal peculiarities were, first, that he taught a natural religion, a religion written in flowers on the earth, one with the stars in their courses. He taught men to judge of themselves what was right. Such ideas rendered a priesthood totally unnecessary. Every priesthood rests upon the assumption that they are the essential solicitors and barristers of truth and holiness, and no man can approach Heaven without them. This teacher of a Father whom men could approach and love, and be loved by, simply through virtue and faith, without any priestly mediator, or any rite or ceremonial, was assailing the very foundation of every temple. Do not go to churches to pray, but to your closet ! Put no trust in tithes !

Consider the lilies ; observe that sower with his seed, or the little mustard seed from which that great tree sprang ; think of God as a father waiting and watching for the return of his poor foolish son from a land of famine ! It was not indeed for the first time simple natural thoughts had come to freshen the heart of the world, but wherever they have come the successful teacher of them has made necessary the death, gradual or violent, of the priesthood or of himself.

But if this had been his only offence Jesus might perhaps have escaped death, for his eloquence and sincerity had won him a popularity which no priest possessed. But he turned the people against him when he added to it that other fatal idea,—namely, that all their hopes of a national political Messiah and military deliverer were vain, that their proud temple was to be overthrown, and their future glory to be found in fraternising with other nations and not in conquering them. That was more than they could stand. The very masses that could shout Hosanna to a son of David, preparing to overthrow Pilate and priesthood together, were found crying “Crucify him,” when he stood as a friend of Samaritans, a welcomer of Greeks who called on him, and a man who had plainly found favour with the Roman governor. The mob was lashed to frenzy when they saw Pilate trying to protect him.

But why should Pilate, as is recorded, have steadily set himself to save Jesus ? Partly no doubt because he was impressed by the grandeur of the man ; but also, it is probable, he felt that no popular man could just then

serve the secular authority better than one engaged in destroying those expectations of a coming national deliverer—of a kind which sometimes fulfil themselves—by substituting for them enthusiasm for a moral and religious reformation. Nothing could have satisfied Pilate more than that the Jews should have generally agreed to such a King of the Jews as he over whose dying head he wrote that title. We may indeed compare with Pilate's inscription Christ's own outburst of wonder when a poor fisherman named him the Anointed of God. "Flesh and blood" could never have attested that there lay any divine mark about that homeless helpless man. There was something transcendental in all this, and, as we have seen, it flamed on through the years of early enthusiasm.

XI.

Some years ago I sat with an assembly in the open theatre at Oberammergau to witness the Passion Play. The stage was tastefully adorned. On the curtain was a picture of Jerusalem, with the mountains rising around it as they rose around us. All about us were symbols of the most ancient German religion sweetly blending with those of early Christianity. On the stage architrave was the Madonna holding the goddess Bertha's rose, whose crimson symbolised a new Heart come to watch over the humble household; and the pelican feeding her young with her blood: emblems now of man's long search to

find attestations in nature of an unnatural faith, ending still in fables ! The old sacred trees of mythology were there, the beech and birch and pine, and the birds sang gaily in their green branches.

The ancient symbols of faith had grown as naturally as the trees, the heart could carol amid them like the birds, while the blue of heaven and the blessed sunshine poured their warm and tender light upon them all.

But what was the figure we were presently to see moving amid that glorious frame, and bearing the name of Christ ! Never before then had I realised how low had sunk the idea of that beautiful heroic soul, in the conventional conception of Christendom. From first to last this Christ of the Passion Play, made up to look like the images turned out by thousands in Italian factories, was about as wooden as one of those images were it only automatic. It was a mere perfunctory high priest, a characterless effigy—no touch of humanity about him no sparkle of feeling, no real wrath, no reality of any kind. Not for a moment could this effect be ascribed to the actor : he acted faithfully the conception of Christ which had been drilled into him by the priests who manage the affair. The Bavarians all regarded it as perfect, for not one of them had ever dreamed of associating true and simple human emotion or action with Jesus. They were looking on a god, accepting every unreality as a token of how divine he was,—so admirably unhuman ! But I will say, even for those poor peasants, that at no time did they evince such horror at the careful crucifixion of Christ as

they did when the thieves' legs were broken. Humanly speaking, Christ did not suffer so much as the thieves. And as to the god,—how could a few hours of physical pain be anything to one engaged in the glorious work of saving a world on his way to share the throne of the universe?

There were numbers of English people there, most of them clergymen. I took some pains to learn their opinion concerning the play and its chief character, and their enthusiasm was boundless. Coming home I found that books, articles, letters, had been written, all full of glowing eulogies of the Ammèrgau Christ, and some speculator was proposing in the *Times* to get up the same thing in London. I have tried to find some one who was shocked, to discover some criticism which should intimate that this passionless simulacrum, who could neither laugh nor cry nor strike back, was not the European ideal of a man. In sooth, he was as much like a man as the Phantasm which demanded his sacrifice was like a god. It was the apotheosis of abjectness.

Precisely opposite in every respect to the perfunctory conventional Christ,—with his unreal difficulties, which he knows he will conquer, and his affectation of the sorrows and feelings of men who must fight their troubles with no angel or reserved omnipotence to help,—is the man whom the gospels portray on any mind not taught to portray him beforehand on the gospels. A man of quick sensibilities, who can flash anger on his best friends when they would drive off the children, and in another

moment be all sunshine as the little ones nestle to his heart. A man who can fulminate lightnings of invective against hypocritical deceivers of the people, when his heart is ready to break with agony for his beloved Jerusalem. Impulsive, sympathetic, and sometimes wonderfully prudent, with the eloquence that speaks from a deep conviction—with authority of conviction, not that of the scribes—so that even rude policemen sent to arrest him return empty-handed, and say only “never man spake like this man ;” a man who knows the power of silence, and then as a sheep before his shearers is dumb !

The conventional European Christ—the Christ of Ammergau—marches on to his cross by a prescribed foreknown path, fulfilling hard and fast theological conditions. The real Christ escapes whenever he can, slips out of the hand of his pursuers, and when death overtakes him at last views it with anguish and dismay. Other martyrs have sung at the stake ; he cries, “ My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me ! ”

That cry could never have been wrung from the lips of a man who saw in his own death a pre-arranged plan for the world’s salvation, and his own return to divine glory, temporarily renounced for transient misery on earth. The fictitious theology of a thousand years shrivels beneath the awful anguish of that cry. He forsaken by God ! Why he *was* God, says Theology, and this was the supreme act of his divinity ! That Christ might have known if he had been trained in the smallest of our theological schools. But he had not that

advantage. To him untimely Death brought pain and unmitigated disappointment. It seemed the end of all the good he could do for humanity. He at least was not acting in a Passion Play. Again and again had Christ tried to escape this danger, even with dexterity, and on his trial he fenced with every art of speech and silence. When he saw the coils of priestly hatred closing around him, his soul was exceeding sorrowful. Death haunted him. When a woman anointed him tenderly, the odour reminded him of death. "She embalms me for burial," he cries, and his very words shudder. He meets his disciples at supper; but when he sees and tastes the red wine, that too suggests death: he recoils, and cries "It's my blood! Drink it yourselves—I'll never taste it again!"

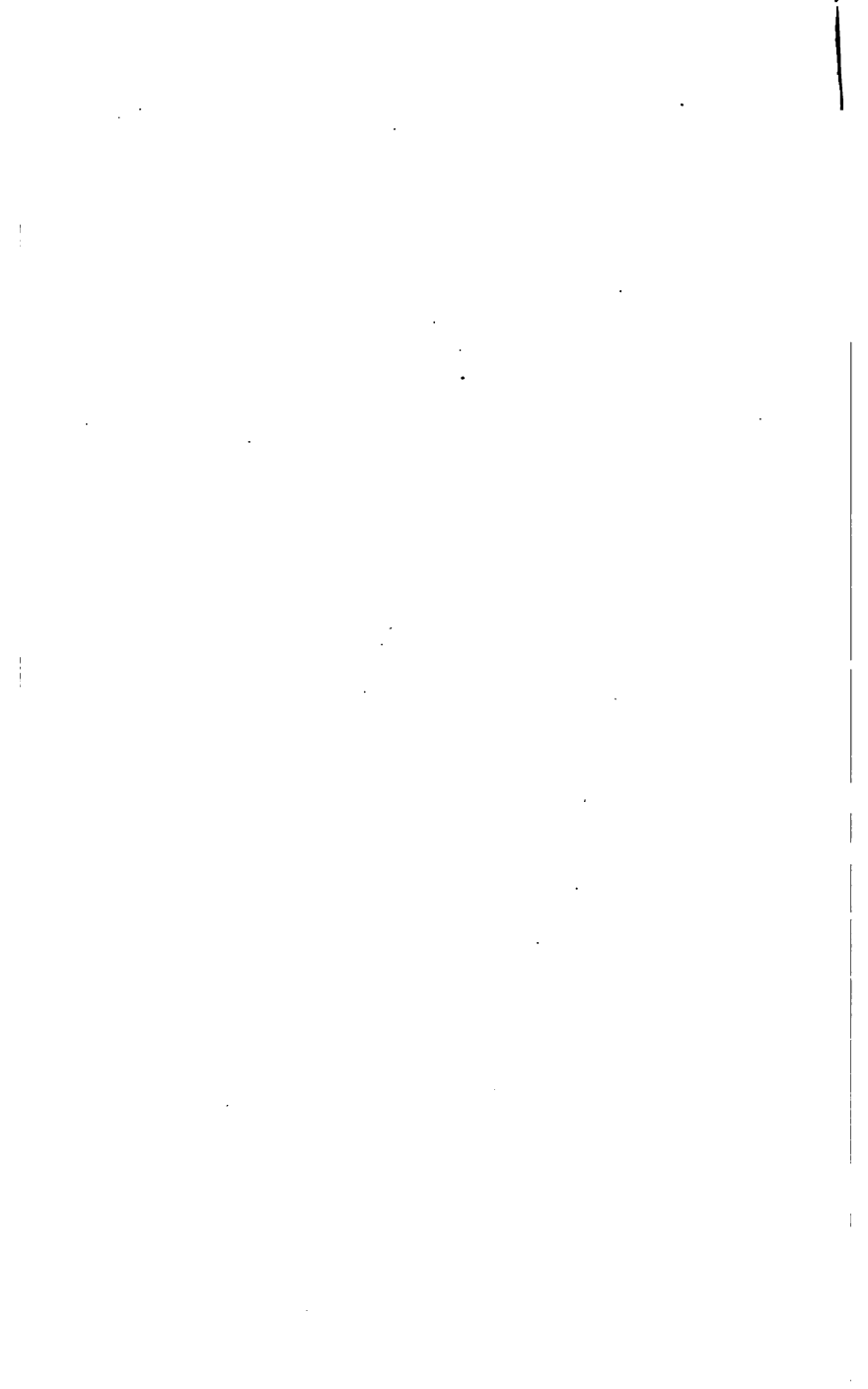
It took many centuries for such ejaculations of a man facing premature and violent death to harden into the formal speeches of New Testament tradition, and longer still to fossilise into sacraments and dogmas. Under these formal dogmatic sophistications the masses of Christendom have been so long moulded that it is hardly to be conceived that they can ever recover the genuine Christ, or come into contact with his spontaneous life, his heart, his genius. And fortunately, it is not a matter of eternal life and death that they should. Yet we may hope that so soon as the people have been educated out of the degrading superstition that a man's eternal well-being or wretchedness depend on a particular opinion about a person who lived in an obscure age and region,

they will at least be free of that paralysing fear which has turned Christ to a graven image. And though it be not a matter of life and death, still it is a grateful and a noble task to rescue the memory of a great man from the perversions and superstitions with which he has been invested, and preserve to our human nature every token and example of its power to rise above the animalism which degrades and the evil which afflicts it, and ascend to the heights of excellence and beatitude.



II

ITS DAWN.





ITS DAWN.

I.

CHRISTIANITY is about fifteen hundred years old. That is about the age of the completed Nicene Creed which first combined into a distinct doctrinal system its previously incoherent elements. As an ecclesiastical and temporal power it is somewhat older, dating from the conversion (A.D. 312) of Constantine, who held his new beliefs mixed up with paganism, as did most of the Latin Christians. The name Christianity is first found used by the opponents of the Christians—such as Pliny the Younger, early in the second century,—but used as name for a crime not for a system of doctrine ; as meaning that it is much later. Although the word Christianity is not found in the New Testament, the word “Christian,” which by no means implies as yet the existence of a system, occurs in the New Testament (Acts xi, 26 ; xxvi, 28 ; 1 Peter iv, 16) three times ; it is in the later books, and is used in a sense indicating that it was a term of reproach or contempt directed against the believers in Christ. It is a slang word, mixed of Greek and Latin. The efforts which

have been made to prove by the sentence (Acts xi), "The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch," that they adopted that title in the first century, while Paul was preaching there, is disproved by the fact that Paul warned his friends against calling themselves after the name of Christ (1 Cor. i, 12). Paul's failure to recognise the title when Agrippa uses it was very marked. Tacitus says :—"So for the quieting of this rumour" (of his having set fire to Rome) "Nero judicially charged with the crime, and punished with most studied severities, that class hated for their general wickedness, whom the vulgar (vulgus) call Christians. The originator of that name was one Christ, who in the reign of Tiberias suffered death by sentence of the procurator, Pontius Pilate. The detestable superstition (exitiabilis superstitio) thereby repressed for the time, again broke out, not only over Judea, the native soil of the mischief, but in the city also, where from every side all atrocious and abominable things collect and flourish."

Looking beyond the form of Christianity to its elements, we might follow Bishop Sherlock as he followed Augustine, and say that Christianity is as old as the Creation, but for the very unphilosophical character of the phrase. One religion differs from another mainly by the outward expression and body it gives to the moral and religious sentiment. To say that Christianity is as old as the Creation is as misleading as to say that Steam-power is as old as the Creation, which in a sense is equally true. Christianity represents a special embodiment and definite application of that religious sentiment which has always

existed, which has been variously organised in the other religions of the world ; and its history is known. Like other religions it may be viewed in three chief aspects : 1, as a moral system ; 2, as a philosophy ; 3, as a mythology.

Our present task is to trace these several elements from their proximate sources to their confluence and combination as Christianity.

II.

As a moral system Christianity is mainly Jewish. In saying this I do not refer to the fundamental laws against murder, theft, and the like, which are common to all historic religions ; nor to such maxims as the Golden Rule, which was not only always a current Levitical rule in Judea, but has been of immemorial use among all great races. But the ethics of Christianity are distinctive only as those of other systems are, that is, in those respects in which their moral laws are not based upon the universal conscience. Such unique moral laws are in any country generally found bearing in the direction of man's supposed duty to God, or of those actions whose performance is meant to bring man into favour with God. In this respect Christianity mainly repeats the laws and rules of the Essenes, a sect which had divided from the Pharisees some two centuries before the birth of Christ. We have ample information concerning this sect from Philo and Josephus. They lived in communities, and did not marry,—depending, not without reason as Pliny declares, upon conversions and initiations from the outside world for their continuance and growth. They pro-

tessed to find a mystical, or allegorical sense in the Hebrew Scriptures, even to the smallest jot and tittle. A convert after undergoing a year's probation was baptized. After a further probation he was received into full membership. If a member committed a fault he was privately reproved by the elders ; if he did not repent he was re-proved before the community ; and if he then did not reform he was excommunicated. They placed before every member the following eight degrees which might be, successively and with increasing difficulty, attained.

1. Outward or bodily purity by baptism ; a symbol of which, given to each, was an apron, such as was used to dry one's self with after baptism.
2. The stage at which the vow of celibacy was taken.
3. Inward or spiritual purity.
4. The banishment of all anger and malice, and the cultivation of a meek and lowly spirit.
5. Holiness.
6. Fitness to become a temple of the Holy Spirit and to prophesy.
7. The devotee advanced to that state when he could perform miraculous cures, and raise the dead.
8. And finally, he who had reached such a rare degree of sanctity and power as the seventh, would fulfil the office of Elias, as forerunner of the Messiah.

These people lived as hermits in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem, along the shores of the Dead Sea, and in the neighbourhood of Alexandria. They would never pray in synagogues, and sent their offerings privately. They were non-resistants, refused to take oaths, and forbade Essenes to go to law. They were especially antagonistic to the Pharisees, because these believed in the outward law without acknowledging any mysterious sense in it.

The New Testament opens with the appearance of a great prophet, John the Baptist, whose dress and speech are those of an Essene, and who denounces other sects without including that. Probably his movement indicated some variations from the early Essenism; but, however that may be, Jesus became one of John's converts, and was baptized by him. For a time he preached the Essene doctrines, and practised them. He did not marry, and recognised the exalted condition of those who made themselves eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven's sake (Matt. xix, 12). He taught non-resistance, selling all one's possessions for the sake of the poor, and baptism. Presently we find him gradually taking on the appearance of a type, rather than of a real person,—a sort of Essene allegory, going through the eight stages:—baptism, the anti-marriage state, inward purification, manifestations of the meek and lowly state of mind, reception of the holy spirit in his body as a temple (transfiguration), and prophecy, curing diseases and raising the dead, and finally—the eighth state, that of Elias, being awarded to John—becoming the Messiah.

This development and process is too normal and regular not to excite our suspicion. I have already noted (c. 1) some of the indirect and unintentional testimony in the New Testament showing that Jesus by no means adhered rigidly to the Essene sect. It is especially remarked that he never baptised any one, and his direction to his disciples to baptise becomes very doubtful when we further find Paul thanking God that he had baptised none. Moreover there is a tradition of his having attended a wedding, of

his eating with publicans and sinners, and his disregarding the Sabbath, all of which are inconsistent with his really having remained with the sect even so far as it may have been represented by John the Baptist. But we shall often have to observe how little the individual mind and character of Christ had to do with shaping Christianity. The Essene moral machinery caught him up and made him over into its model saint, to so large an extent that we shall never perhaps know how far during life he really followed that sect. When the system of Christianity was finally formed we find its moral elements, beyond those common to all religions, to be Essene,—namely, baptism, celibacy, communism among the most holy and sacramental communion as a relic of it among the less holy, religious orders with initiations, secret signs resembling those of the Essene hermits of Syria and Egypt. There is much abjectness calling itself lowly, and mendicancy aping self-denial. There are elders with powers of private rebuke and public excommunication. The becoming of temples for the Holy Ghost reappears as ecstasy, and there are saints claiming power to work miracles. All this represented a scheme of sanctity which from many more primitive sources had cohered in the Essene sect, and, through the prestige of Christ, passed to be the inheritance of Christianity.

III.

The Christian Philosophy is much less simple as to its sources. It resulted from a most singular interchange

and interaction at great intervals between the Semitic and the Hellenic minds. At some very early period the Greeks had derived from the Hebrews the worst feature of their religion,—that of Human Sacrifices. This was an idea alien to the Aryan race from which they sprang. It was a famous point made by Buddha against the Brahmins, that if they thought the gods were fond of precious offerings they ought logically to offer their own children. The first cases of human sacrifices among the Greeks were sufficiently isolated to be made the themes of great poems. The salient instance of Iphigenia, who was vowed to a deity, but not sacrificed,—a kid having been miraculously substituted for her,—bears in it traces of having been mixed from the story of Abraham and Isaac, for whom a ram was substituted, and that of Jephthah's daughter, whose name is probably travestied in Iphigenia. The Greeks, having borrowed this notion, elaborated it into a sort of theosophic conception that the stern deities could only be appeased by sacrifice of the most pure, unblemished, virginal beings, and it remained a theory and sentiment among them long after it had ceased to be a practical part of the Hebrew religion.

Meanwhile the Hebrews had come under Greek influence, and for some centuries before Christ had gradually been personifying the Wisdom of God. In the poetry of the Old Testament much is said of the "Word" of Jehovah. We find it recurring in the Psalms,—“By the Word of Jehovah were the heavens made ;” “he sent his Word and healed them ;” “his Word runneth very swiftly.” Then we find, as I have said, “Wisdom ” more

clearly personified, especially in the writings ascribed to Solomon,—“Doth not Wisdom cry?” “Where shall Wisdom be found?” Wisdom speaks, saying—“Jehovah possessed me in the beginning of his way. Before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting. Then was I by him as one brought up with him. And I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him.” When we come to the region of time covered by the Apocryphal books of the Old Testament and the Talmud we find the course of personification has so far advanced that Jehovah is no longer alone,—that the “Word” and “Wisdom” have blended to form a being capable of being further identified with the “Logos” of Plato, which had undergone a similar process at the hands of the Platonic School of Alexandria. It so happened that the head of that school, at the time of Christ’s appearance, was a learned Jew named Philo. His great aim was to recommend Jewish ideas to his Hellenic philosophers and friends, and, chiefly through him, the identity of the personified “Wisdom” and the “Logos” was already established. But it was still an invisible ideal until that great work—the Fourth Gospel—appeared. Who wrote that book no man knows. All that we know is that it was written by an Alexandrine philosopher about the latter part of the second century, and that it had a distinctly theoretical purpose. It was the keystone which completed the arch formed by the Hebrew “Wisdom” on one side, and the Hellenic “Logos” on the other.

Next we have to consider Paul, who had imported other ideas into the swelling mass of theory. Brought up

a Pharisee, and still preserving so much of his original belief that when accused he did not hesitate to cry "I am a Pharisee," Paul aimed to have his idea of Christ fulfil that sacrificial notion which he found as deeply rooted among the Gentiles as among his own countrymen. The deity was to be soothed by immolation of the purest and best ; but as the world was now refined beyond the coarse and literal sacrifice of Macarias and Iphigenias, Christ was represented by him as such an exceedingly pure and perfect being that he would answer as a substitute for all other sacrifices, and for the human race in all ages. This idea, coarse as it now appears, denoted in its day a distinct ascent of the human mind above one more repulsive.

When Paul—whose voice and theme inspired from afar the eloquent but unknown author of the Epistle to the Hebrews—established this point, he had not the slightest anticipation of the new philosophy which was to arise and embody itself in the gospel said to be written after traditions received from John. But Paul did other important work towards forming Christianity, principally by breaking down Jewish exclusiveness, the partition-wall between Jew and Gentile—and preparing the way for the new faith to become a general religion instead of merely another Jewish sect. When Christianity came to be formulated by the two great Nicene Councils (A.D. 325 and 381) these elements were already prepared. The doctrine of the personality of the Holy Ghost has an archæological history too long to be traced here ; nor is that necessary, for, so far as its appearance in Christianity

is concerned, we need look for its origin no farther than the Fourth Gospel and the Epistles of Paul. Egyptian Paganism still insisted on three gods; Philosophy demanded unity: the compromise was a triune godhead.

The doctrine of a personal Spirit of Evil, originating in Persia, had invested some centuries before the birth of Christ an Assyrian angel of Accusation, —Satan,—and he had become degraded from a retributive agent of God into a fiend. There was no philosophy of evil at the time to secure even the mind of Christ against this idea. And, indeed, however repulsive it may be now, at that period it seemed essential to the growth of a pure ideal of God, as infinite Love, with whom the origination of evil could not be associated. The world was recoiling from the worship of demons under guise of deities, and the new ideal was secured by attributing all phenomena of evil to imps, furies, dragons,—all of which were ultimately generalised by Christianity into Satan, whose works it was the mission of Christ to destroy.

IV.

We come now to consider the Christian Mythology. Under this title I include all those supernatural narratives in the New Testament upon which Christianity rested its authority over, and against, human conscience and reason. I know well that there are some able men who do not regard these miracles as purely mythical or fictitious. They say, and it is perfectly true, that there are many instances in history, especially in periods of religious excitement, when men and women afflicted with disease

have experienced remarkable physiological effects, and even temporary cures, from the word or touch of an individual in whose magical powers they had faith. I should be perfectly ready to concede that some of the apparently marvellous actions ascribed to Christ might be found by analysis not subversive of natural laws. But before having to explain them or account for them on rational or scientific principles, it is first of all necessary to inquire whether there be any testimony of importance showing that anything of the kind was believed to have occurred by those who must have witnessed or heard of them if they did occur.

Now, in the case of the alleged miracles performed by Christ, we have the very strongest evidence that he never did work them, nor anything like them, that he never professed to work them, that he regarded the whole principle of miracle-working with contempt.

In the first place we have his own words, when asked for a sign. He replies, "A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign, and there will no sign be given to it." It is true that to this is added, "but the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and nights in the whale's belly, so will the Son of Man be three days and nights in the heart of the earth." But we have reason to believe that this reference to Jonah was not made by Christ, inasmuch as it rests only on the authority of judaising Matthew, and, as we have seen, anticipates the legend of his resurrection after three days' burial, which could only have arisen after his death. But, it may be asked, by what right do you take one part of

the utterance as genuine and reject the other? I answer, simply because the writer of a gospel full of signs and wonders would never have invented so sharp a rebuke of signs and wonders; but when he had to report such an utterance he might naturally have tried to soften it by interpolating an exception in favour of the resurrection,—the main sign around which the believers were gathering,—and its supposed prefiguration in the story of Jonah. Again, in his parable of the rich man and Lazarus, Christ represents Abraham as saying, “If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither would they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.” Startled they might be, but not really persuaded of the truth as he wished men to be persuaded who said, “Why even of your own selves judge ye not what is right;” who pointed men to the light and cloud of morning and evening and bade them discern the signs of their time as they did the weather in the sky; who chose his texts and parables from nature—the lily, the mustard-seed, the falling sparrow.

The high improbability that a mind such as this should have also claimed to work the very signs against which he protested, is corroborated by the absence of any reference to such performances in the writings of his contemporaries. Here was Philo, who was twenty years of age when Christ was born and who lived long after his death. If any man had appeared at Jerusalem professing to be a Messiah and working wonders, there is no man whom the news would reach more certainly than Philo; yet we do not find the least allusion to such things in any of that writer’s various works. Again there

was Josephus, who wrote a minute account of the Jews and their history, including the affairs of that very period. He appeared in the first generation after Christ's death. And yet we do not find in his work that even any rumours existed of a man working miracles or wonders. Next we have Clement, who, we know, wrote in the same century in which Christ died, mentioned by Paul as his fellow-labourer. Clement wrote an Epistle, known to be a genuine production of the first century, in which no allusion is made to any miracle wrought by Christ or his Apostles. The same is true of Ignatius, about whom there was a tradition that he was one of those children that Jesus took in his arms: he died about a hundred years after Christ's birth, but left no mention of the miracles. Both Pliny and Tacitus mention Christ and the Christians, but neither hint that any miracles were spoken of in their time, that is, at the close of the first and beginning of the second century. And finally, there are the voluminous writings of Paul, writings by a man whose birth in Jerusalem was very near the period of Christ's death,—if, indeed, it did not precede that event, since in his Epistle to Philemon (about A.D. 60) he speaks of himself as "Paul the aged." Paul does not allude to any miracle wrought by Christ, nor to any rumour that miracles were associated with his ministry, nor even mention the names of those afterwards connected with such events. Such stories are related only in anonymous writings called gospels, not professing (unless in one case where we know the profession untrue) to be records by eye-witnesses, traditions collected late in the second

century, and by no means to be set against the works whose authorship and early origin are undisputed. Are we to believe that a man appeared in the greatest city of the East, wrought miracles, healed the sick, raised the dead, and that all this was unknown to the chief historians and authors of his own era,—his enemies not ridiculing such stories, his own devoted Apostles never even faintly alluding to them? That is plainly incredible.

But how, then, shall we account for the Christian Mythology as we find it in the canon of the New Testament ratified by the Council of Carthage, A.D. 397? Why, the stories represent only the familiar fables and folklore of the people swarming in Greece and Rome from every part of the World. Among all the miracles of the New Testament not one is original. Bacchus had changed wine into water. Ancient heroes and sages were generally said to have sprung of the unions between the gods and daughters of men. In Arabian Mythology Abraham's birth was announced by a star. By a star Eneas and his companions were guided from the shores of Troy to the West. The sacred dove had betokened to Noah the emergence of the world from its baptism before it descended on Christ at his baptism, and in many lands it had been the emblem of renewal, its note being the first voice of spring. Moses and Elias also fasted forty days. Buddha and Zoroaster were also tempted by Evil Powers, and pursued by kings like Herod. Five or six centuries before Christ, Pythagoras was said to have miraculously named the number of an enormous draught of fishes,—a legend the more remarkable because the

Egyptian Essenes closely resembled the Pythagorean communities, and inherited many of their legends. Pythagoras had power to still waves and tempests at sea. Elijah made the widow's meal and oil increase; Elisha fed a hundred men with twenty loaves; the Hindoo Saint Mugdala, giving from his little store of food to Holy Duriasa finds that store inexhaustible; many such myths preceded that of the loaves and fishes. As for opening blind eyes, healing diseases, walking on water, casting out demons, raising the dead, resurrection, ascension, all these have been the common mythologic currency of every race, from the beginning of time to the present, when stories of a similar kind are firmly credited by those who put their faith in so-called Spirit-mediums.

It is highly important to understand the sources of Christian Mythology, in order not to fall into the error of supposing that the miraculous legends were invented by the early Christians, as an intentional imposture. Such is by no means the fact. The popular superstitions of the people about their gods, prophets, heroes, genii, had invested hundreds of forgotten beings before they were told of Pythagoras, Bacchus or Elias, and by the same process they invested Christ and his mother, and passed on to be told of the Apostles, and then of Saints—like the first Bishop of Jerusalem, who turned water into oil to feed the lamps; and holy Paul, to whose cave St. Anthony came, when the raven, which had been bringing the hermit a daily half-loaf for sixty years, now brought a whole one; and St. Stephen, whose dead body restored five other bodies to life,—oddly enough without

resuscitating itself. The mantle of myth falls from prophet to prophet, from saint to saint, and it represents the love and homage of the ignorant for the great whose influence they feel but cannot comprehend.

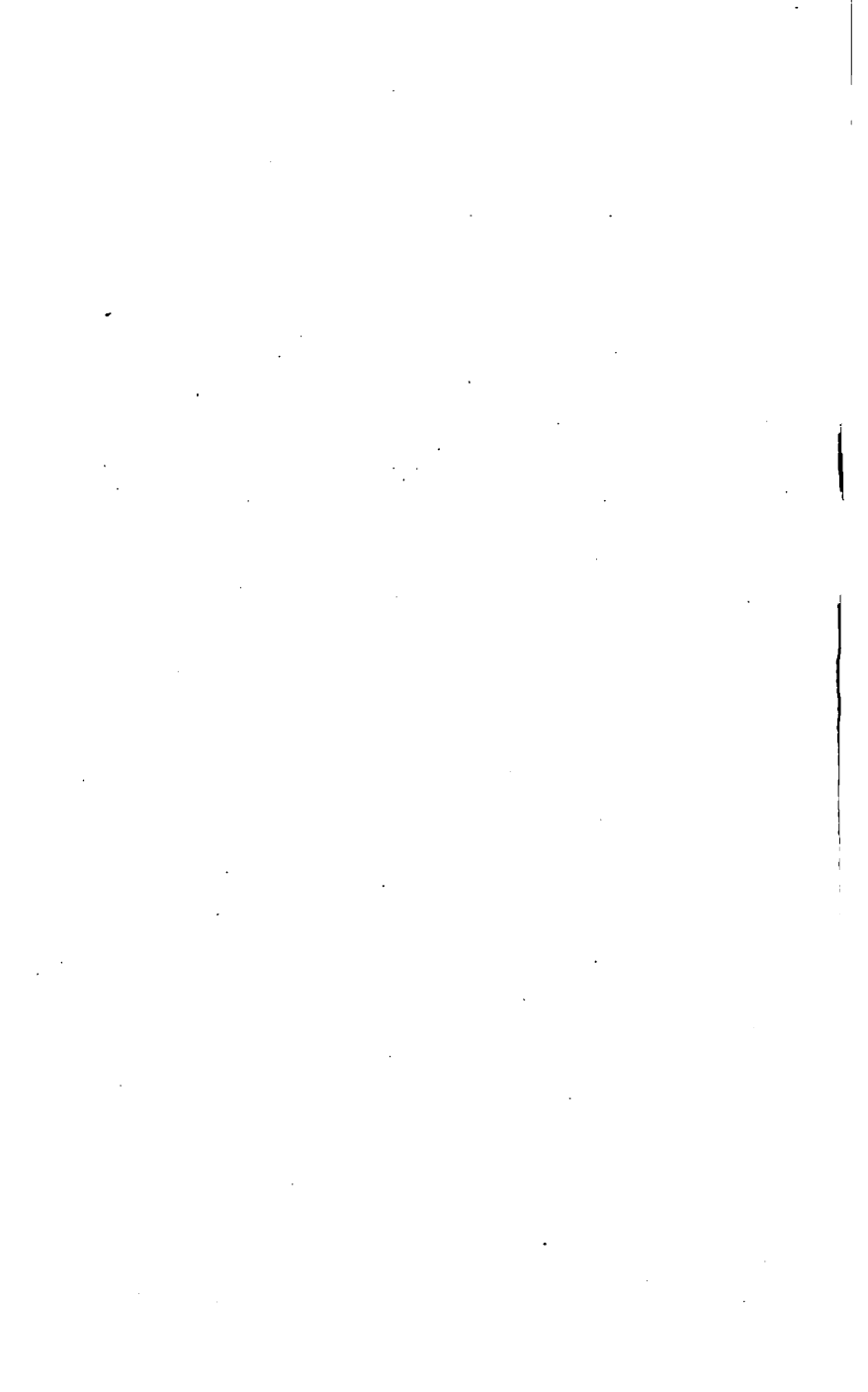
It is not easy to acquit the authorities of the early Church, as we can the common people, of dishonesty. They encouraged what they knew were superstitions, and added to them. However, it is fortunately of no importance to us to draw the line between their credulity and their dishonesty. It is enough that we know the pedigree of every Christian myth, and that not one of them has any connection with Christ whatever. Only one, indeed, was heard of in the first Century, the resurrection of Christ. Of that Paul had heard, and his eager belief in it shows how ready he would have been to believe Christ's own miracles if he had heard of them. Of this particular miracle it need only be remarked that Paul's testimony to it is valueless for the supernaturalist, since, after naming those who had seen the risen Christ, he places all their evidence on the same unsatisfactory footing as his own. He tells us that the only appearance of Christ to him was as to "one born out of due season,"—which may mean the apparition of some spiritual ecstasy, but at any rate by no means fulfils the conditions even of that low degree of evidence which any man's word or belief could supply for such a fact.

The Mythology had a long time in which to gather around Christ; the stories were already floating about, and the old forms they had once invested were crumbling or discredited. They had at least from 100 to 200

years to make their way into the traditions about Christ as we find them in the New Testament ; and in an uncritical, unscientific age that is more than five centuries of England.

But this I would observe : the philosophy, the ascetic rules, the mythology, which we have been tracing, could not gather around Christ while he was a living man, nor around his name so long as it was associated with a personal influence. As in some countries villages gather around extinct volcanoes and plant their vintages in the lava which once streamed down their slopes as fire, so it was long after the first enthusiasm kindled by Jesus and John had cooled, and they had become chiefly names to conjure with, that the priesthood, whose line has never been broken, fenced in the hardened lava of their hearts, and turned its subtle quality and lingering virtues to their own ends. Personally, Christ's heaviest blow was at the very principle of a priesthood. When Christianity was formed it meant Christ's whole prestige and popularity impressed to rebuild that very power which he assailed and which crucified him.





III.

ITS DAY.



ITS DAY.

I.

FOR a thousand years Christianity reigned over Europe with undisputed sway. That may be called its Day. What power the Christian Hierarchy held may be partly estimated by comparison with the supremacy of our Courts of Law. The Holy Trinity in Heaven was the symbol and authority of a mighty engine of ecclesiastical power on earth, which brought its force and its sanctions to bear on every nation, throne, home, and on every man, woman, and child. The statutes of this religious Empire consisted of the Bible as codified in creeds, arbitrarily interpreted by Pope and prelates, and applied by a priesthood armed with the strength of kings and nobles, armies and navies. That which Tacitus sneered at as a "detestable superstition," had gained such ascendancy that the world saw the last of the Cæsars holding the stirrup by which a Christian Pontiff mounted his horse—an incident which signalled the conquest of what is now called Christendom.

It is sometimes claimed by theologians that this spreading of Christianity far and wide is in itself a proof of its

divine origin, and of the providence that attended it. But on this it must be remarked that its spread has been surpassed by several rival religions. Mahommedanism,—wielding the same powers that Christianity wielded, the sword and authority of princes,—has, in a far shorter time, gained numbers as great of people much more united and earnest in their faith. Buddhism, without aid of the sword, in far less time had almost doubled Christianity in numbers. Only a hundred years ago the Wesleyan movement was a despised revival going on in the streets of English cities and towns; now it is not only a very large sect in England, but the largest in the United States. Any one who has observed the contemporary agitation called “Spiritualism,” may see how such movements are spread. Spiritualism in a few years has run up to millions, where in the same length of time the Christian revival had not won a thousand adherents; and the propagandists of Spiritualism, having to run the gauntlet of a shrewd sceptical age, without the power of life and death over gainsayers, have exceeded the numerical triumphs of Christianity during a corresponding length of time after it possessed that power. So, the theory that the spread of Christianity is evidence of its divine origin, proves too much one way, for it would show a greater providential favour attending other religions; and it proves too little in another way, for it leaves us to ask why Providence has not enabled it to swallow up its rivals.

It has also been said that the trials and martyrdom of the early followers of the crucified teacher, and those who subsequently believed in him, are proof of the truth of

that in which they believed. We are asked whether it is possible men would undergo such sufferings for a falsehood. To this my reply is, that most of those martyrdoms took place before there was any system rightly called Christianity in the world. In those primitive days, before Christianity ascended the throne of Europe, the believers were humble people who were confronting proud established religions, such as Christianity itself afterwards became. They did then have truth with them—at least far higher truth than was embodied in the pagan systems against which they were rebelling. That truth sustained them, filled them with enthusiasm. It does not, however, prove that there was not with their truth much admixture of error. When Christianity afterwards spread through Germany and Britain, it had to propagate itself with fire and sword; and many thousands in these Northern nations were found as ready as the early believers in Christ to undergo martyrdom for the sake of their gods and goddesses—a fact which raised an inscrutable problem before the early Christian zealots themselves. Our ancestors had to confront the alternatives, “Be baptised or burnt;” and though many were baptised many others were burnt, or slain by such refinements of torture as having vipers thrust down their throats. But all that does not prove that the pagan martyrs died for the truth. Nor does Christian martyrdom prove that the beliefs of the sufferers were true.

Christianity never numbered a fourth as many martyrs as were sacrificed by itself when it came into power. These martyrs were not only pagans but heretics from its

own ranks. Indeed, its constitution from a society of voluntary adherents into a great compulsory authority, denotes the fact that it gained and preserved its long day of rule only against the protest of many honest minds, which it was necessary to crush.

II.

Nevertheless, Christianity did prevail, and it is now open to us to analyse the sources from which its power was fed.

1. Popular Ignorance. There was no printing-press, no school: the masses could not read. The few books in existence were monopolised by the priests. For untold ages the training of the people had been in gross superstition, an endless instruction to make themselves as blind as possible, and to follow priestly guides implicitly, under temporal and eternal penalties. Even here, in this comparatively enlightened country, how few are they who personally study the laws under which they live! How naturally we trust all that to judges and lawyers! How few, again, study the laws of health, or investigate their own frames! The great mass trust themselves entirely to the doctors. In those early days the people surrendered themselves even more unquestioningly to the priestly barristers of heaven and physicians of the soul. When Christ appealed to the people in Jerusalem, he was met with the cry—"Have any of the rulers or Pharisees believed on him? But this multitude that knows not the law are accursed." The great crime of Christ was,

“He stirreth up the people.” Every such effort to induce the masses to think for themselves was sure to be crushed. Since the day when the man, woman and serpent were said to have been all cursed by Jehovah for a joint conspiracy to learn something, every priesthood has hated all real education of the masses; and though in some countries they have had to yield to the popular hunger for knowledge, they still insist that it shall not be had except as adulterated with such drugs of superstition as shall paralyse, so far as possible, their ability to use it.

2. Celibacy. Abstention from marriage, though it originated in mere asceticism, was retained among the priesthood because it was found to be one of the most potent means of preserving the Church as a compact centralised system. One can hardly repress a smile on observing how simple to Père Hyacinthe appears his violation of Catholic law in this particular, and how easy he seems to think it would be for the Church of Rome to relax its rule. The fact is, the Church began by holding the celibacy of its priesthood in a lax way, and its whole progress has gone hand-in-hand with increased strictness in that law. The chief reason why the Western Church so far surpassed the Eastern in power and influence was because the latter did not preserve a celibate priesthood. Lord Bacon said, “He that hath a wife and children hath given hostages to fortune.” It is certainly true. The man of family has given hostages to his own state, to his community. He has not his whole stake in a Church. The Pope cannot say to that man who has an interest in

some locality, a home where his affections are centred, "Go," and he goeth, or "Come," and he cometh. His loyalty is divided. He is brought under social influences that may be far removed from those which surround the distant centre of an ecclesiastical system. The Roman Catholic priest has always been the trustworthy servant of his Church, because wherever he may be in the world he is moved by nerves that centre in Rome. He has no other interest, no other passion, and no hope of advancement from any other source. Cut off from hopes of social distinction, political promotion, military renown, or family joys, he is thus and thus only in a position to be absolutely occupied with the interests of his Church. Christianity could never have reigned in Europe had it not possessed a priesthood bound to its service in body and soul. For this reason the Church was far more ready to relax the rules of morality than of that which prevented a priest from having a legal wife and family. It was but very slowly that the English people and clergy, even when the Reformation began, could bear the idea of a married priesthood; and they were more willing to recognise illegal than legal relations. The Archbishop of York took an oath that he was not legally married, though he was; and Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, for a long time carried about his wife concealed in a large chest with breathing holes in it. From the day that the English clergy began to marry Romanism declined, not only as a power but as a system of doctrine; for the priesthood was subjected to all those social influences which make the progress of mankind.

3. The Confessional. This institution no doubt originated in the natural influence exerted by wise and sympathetic individuals over the humble people who came to them for counsel or support. When this pure and simple influence was formulated and invested with the right of command under shelter of secrecy, the Church was able to spring its engine upon the individual with immense power. It was able to utilise the intimate condition, the morbid fears, the sentiment of each man and woman. It could ferret out secrets and turn them to strength. No conspiracy against its authority could escape detection in the confessional. Every sin confessed made the poor penitent a slave. The priest had each offender in his power, whose secret he knew ; and, if his authority in the community were assailed, his menaced retainers were all around to sustain the detective, who himself had no family or any corresponding interest at stake.

4. Sanctions. Christianity possessed the right to punish every offence or unbelief to any extent, even with death : by this means it was able to silence all who ventured to criticise its creeds, and to reward largely those who maintained them with special devotion. It was thus able to press into its service all the learning, the genius, and the arts of the time. By killing off all men of ability who would not submit, the Church was able to cover its walls with admirable pictures of the torments awaiting all who did not obey it, and the bliss of all who did. It had skilled orators who could artfully defame all other beliefs than its own, and scribes able to bring out of the Bible just what the Church desired. The masses were thus

fettered not only outwardly but inwardly ; each was trained from the cradle to believe that the same hand which Providence had empowered to bind him or her on earth could bind them also beyond the grave to all eternity.

5. The Prestige of Christ. While Christ was on earth the common people heard him gladly. He had taken their side against an oppressive priesthood ; he had taken his lot with the poor and the outcast ; he had appealed to what was deepest and best in every man ; he had treated women with respect and even the sinful with affection. He had taught the divine love to those who had heard only of an angry and jealous Jehovah. He had uttered many beautiful discourses and parables, bringing the highest truths within realisation of the lowly, whereas previously they had been speculations confined to philosophers. He had been transmitted from generation to generation as an ideal type, in whom were embodied the wisdom, gentleness, and peace for which all hearts longed.

Christianity added to this much that was calculated to influence the people powerfully. It made a new Christ. It represented him as a deity who, moved by compassion for the poor who were all under sentence of everlasting tortures, laid aside the splendour of his celestial abode, descended to the earth ; assumed the form of an humble working man, a carpenter ; became the very poorest of the poor, having not where to lay his head ; suffered the most ignominious death, voluntarily ;—all this for the sake of mankind, and in order to save them from eternal anguish. To this end, they alleged, he had founded a

Church to represent him, and any disobedience to that Church was base ingratitude to a Saviour who had undergone so much for human advantage.

Fictitious as this representation was in every particular, it was very effective. In the first place it made the masses more contented with their poverty. It was a consecration of pauperism that the best man ever born was the poorest. Various sentences of his also could be quoted levelled against riches. It was very important to the Church that the people should be willing to part easily with the fruit of their toil, and that they should be satisfied with the least part for themselves. For the Church itself must be rich : its treasures belonged to the king of heaven.

Another thing fostered by the pathetic pictures of Christ's poverty and low position, and also by his patient submission under suffering, was a kind of abject and spiritless character among the people. They were thoroughly tamed. They thought of themselves as worms, and any idea of having rights or trying to obtain them could never arise, so long as the meek, self-sacrificing, unresisting, peasant of Nazareth was pictured on every Church wall and in every sermon as the type of what God demanded every human being should aspire to be.

It will thus be seen that the thousand years of Christian sway implied innumerable populations bound hand and foot, mind and body ; that its long day of power was a long night to the mind and heart of Europe. But there were holy stars watching through this long night. Christianity could not entirely quench the pure

flame of Christ's heart, and still less could it arrest that steady evolution of humanity and religion which is the unwearied eternal providence.

III.

In judging the tree by its fruits I must affirm my conviction that the fruits of Christianity, though not altogether evil, were preponderantly evil.

The chief root of its evil was that it taught mankind that their supreme duty is to believe certain propositions ; and that the very worst sin man or woman can commit is to disbelieve those propositions. The motto of Christianity was: "The Church has a remedy for every sin except heresy." Higher than morality, conduct, or character, was set this unquestioning submission of the mind to creeds. Now, it may be said that a man's belief determines his conduct and character. But that is not true. Some philologists say that the word *believe* is one form of an old word meaning to *belove* ; but, if so, "belief" and "belove" long ago parted company, and, at any rate, the kind of belief which the Church has all along demanded has been an assent apart from performance. If we examine the creeds for which it demanded belief we find that they have little or nothing to do with a man's character. The Apostles' creed has no word about duty. The Athanasian creed opens by saying, "Whoever will be saved, *before all things* it is necessary that he hold the Catholic faith," and it goes on to recite the Catholic faith,—namely, the Trinity, the

deity of Christ, and his coming to judge the quick and the dead. It anathematises those who confound the persons or divide the substance of the Trinity. Out of about 700 words in it one sentence has a vague reference to conduct, in that it says that they who have done good shall go to everlasting life, and they who have done evil to everlasting fire ; but the force of even this one sentence is broken by the definition of belief in the mysteries of heaven as necessary for salvation "before all things." The Nicene Creed does not even mention good and evil deeds ; it anathematises only those who deny the eternal deity of Christ. But a man cannot live the Trinity. He cannot reduce the eternal procession of the Holy Ghost to a way of loving his neighbour as himself. I once heard of a venerable lady who said 'Total Depravity was a very good doctrine if it was only lived up to ; but even she, I fancy, would find difficulty in living up to the uncreate co-eternal subsistence of the Three Persons. The Nicene creed declares its objects of worship incomprehensible. The Church declares its doctrines and sacraments mysteries. Belief in them therefore cannot be an intelligent belief : it can only amount to assent, or an admission that a thing is true without any real grounds for believing it true. That kind of assent, without knowledge of the thing assented to, must be either superstition or hypocrisy. The result of this kind of teaching is that the name of Jesus became the label of Jesuitism, and that another name for falsehood ; that intellectual veracity was denounced as a crime

and scientific men compelled to renounce on their knees their actual knowledge; and that by such means as these reason was dishonoured, research discouraged, dishonesty fostered, and both the moral and intellectual progress of mankind seriously retarded.

A cognate evil was that Christianity was from the first based on the notion that the great end of man was to give pleasure and benefit to God. Its theory was that God was profoundly concerned to have certain creeds believed and rites performed, and would be disturbed and enraged if not so satisfied. It was discovered long ago, and became a political maxim, that the object of all government is benefit of the governed; but the Church persisted in holding the good of man subordinate to the pleasure of God. And as the Church identified itself with God it made its system not a means but an end. The result of this error was that man was freely sacrificed, holocausts of men burned and massacred. Christianity carried fire and sword among Jewish and Mussulman races to such an extent that it has become a symbol of violence and discord, under which no religious unity can ever be secured. It has successively alienated Science and Humanity.

Under these tremendous doctrines and mysteries, raised up as the chief thing, such things as pertained to every day life shrank to insignificance. The Methodist still sings,

O tell me no more
Of this world's vain show.

IV.

But let us consider, on the other hand, what advantages it secured.

First of all, notwithstanding its horrible doctrine of human depravity, it gave man some conception of the grandeur of his own nature. It taught the people to believe in their own immortality. The humblest mother, as she looked upon the babe in her arms, saw in it a soul whose existence would run parallel to the existence of God. No doubt that great light cast many shadows. There was joined to it those pictures of Heaven and Hell which powerfully stimulated selfishness and fear. It also, to a large extent, projected beyond the grave devotion and enthusiasm of which this world ought not to have been defrauded. But at that time there was need that mankind should attain a profounder sense of the far-reaching issues of human life and the eternal dignity of human nature, and such was one effect of that doctrine.

In the next place it conferred some dignity on labour, and on the toiling class. The Church acknowledged a carpenter for its founder and a fisherman for its first pope. It preached a kingdom to which the humblest were to be admitted along with the greatest. The Church did not practice as it preached : it allied itself with princes and nobles to crush the masses into serfs : but it could never quite undo its faith by its faithlessness, and it advanced the idea of human equality.

Along with the many evils it inflicted on woman, evils from which it must be long before we can recover, it did,

as I think, awaken some reverence for that sex. I do not mean that it surpassed other religions in this : all religions indeed have had their Madonnas and Holy Families ; but the ideal of womanhood consecrated by Christianity in Mary was purer and more tender than that previously prevailing even in Europe. I am indeed putting the matter in its very best light. It can never be forgotten that Christianity took away from Woman, both in Rome and in Germany, the legal and political rights which have never since been restored to her. Yet with all this, there is little doubt that the exaltation of the Madonna mitigated the stern sway of such gods as Jehovah, Jupiter, and Odin ; that it preserved the beauty and grace of the goddesses, while adding graciousness, humility, and the love that endures ; and that it taught rude and warlike nations that it was noble, not weak, to be loyal to the sentiment and moral genius of woman.

These appear to me the only religious and moral benefits by which we can offset the evils wrought by Christianity. With regard to other kinds of benefit it has, I know, been the fashion to credit that system with the learning—such as it was—preserved and acquired during the middle ages. But in truth the evolution of the world simply went on beneath and through the terrible oppression which it brought upon the human mind ; it went on despite the system, not because of it. Christianity destroyed no popular superstitions. It did not deny the existence of pagan deities, but merely degraded them into devils, and left them to haunt the world even now as goblins and imps. What pleasant fables were told of the gods were

transferred to its own saints and angels. This has proved indeed an incidental advantage to Comparative Mythology, which can now gather up the myths of European paganism from the lives and legends of the saints ; but the Church would hardly accept the thanks of Science for that, if offered. In its Day of Supremacy no great man or cause arose against which the Church did not fight. It burnt the best books in the street, and the best men at the stake. It encouraged Art, and pictorial Art it may almost claim to have created. Because the picture had to be to the people what the Bible and all other books are to us to-day, artists arose who painted the Bible, and the legends which made the chief literature, with every circumstance of beauty and impressiveness. Yet though the Church so inspired it also perverted Art. Its great painters have left us endless biblical scenes, holy virgins, and saints, but failed to transmit to us, with any fulness, the life and scenery of their own times. Christianity built grand cathedrals, but beggared the homes of the people for them. The most we can say for it is that it was the best thing attainable in its time ; that it was a necessary phase or chapter in the history of the world ; and amid all its immediate evils cherished some vital germs whose growth involved its own dissolution.





IV.

ITS DECLINE.



ITS DECLINE.

I.

THERE are excellent persons who cannot yet hear such a phrase as "the decline of Christianity" without feeling scandalised. They wish it to be considered that it is a false, spurious Christianity which is disappearing, or has disappeared, but that there is a true Christianity which is advancing to take its place. Such may be assured that I do not believe the religion, virtues, and ideas which they label Christian are declining ; in a further chapter are presented my reasons for thinking that such religion, virtues and ideas can not be justly described as Christianity in any sense ; at present I speak only of Christianity as it is interpreted by the vast majority of its adherents. And this, I maintain, has already declined. Its name preserves popularity, but only because the real substance of its power—belief in its dogmas and sanctions—has passed away, and it has become by verbal fiction associated with the enlightened sentiment of the modern age.

By consensus of all great Christian sects, whether Roman, Eastern, or Protestant, the fundamental doctrines

of Christianity are—1, the Fall of Man ; the corruption of his nature, whereby every person has incurred the penalty of eternal anguish ; 2, the Vicarious Atonement of Christ ; who by his sufferings and death satisfied the Divine Law, and opened a way of escape from the penalty and anguish to all who by faith accept the benefit of his sacrifice ; 3, the deity of Christ ; which alone could have made his atonement satisfactory in lieu of the whole human race ; 4, the publication of this danger, and the plan of redemption, in an inspired revelation, authenticated by miracles ; 5, the eternal blessedness of all who accept and believe this plan or scheme of salvation, and the everlasting torment of those who reject and disbelieve the same.

The various Christian sects may severally demand more than this, but, with unimportant and largely out-voted exceptions, they all hold these dogmas as essential to Christianity. And these dogmas, I affirm, have had their day and declined ; and I affirm that only because I believe it can be proved.

Now, to what tribunal are we to look for the verdict upon any system of belief ? So far as it is a philosophy we must look to the philosophers ; so far as it is a cosmogony we must look to men of science ; so far as it is a system of morality we must look to the daily life of mankind. If we seek to know whether the Gnostic philosophy has passed away we look among contemporary philosophers to find if it is held by any school or thinker if we inquire whether the Ptolemaic cosmogony survives, or the Mosaic, we look to see if any astronomer believes

it ; and if we find none of those who best understand the subject believing those systems, we recognise them as having declined, even though thousands of the unlearned should be shown holding notions traceable to them. We may appeal to a popular jury when the question arises, not whether such systems are true, but whether they are popularly believed.

But further, we must be certain that our tribunal is not only competent, but impartial. A judge cannot sit in his own case. Thus, in the case of Christianity, there are many learned men who advocate it ; but because they are advocates—because they wear the uniform and badge of retained and feed religious attorneys—we can not agree that they shall be judges. The clergy and the ministry as a body must be ruled out ; they have too much at stake. Why, what would become of them, their churches and chapels, their livings, their prospects, and their credit, if it should suddenly be made known to all men that all they have been preaching is a consistent mass of errors? The majority of them are, no doubt, sincere : but self-interest, the long habit of looking mainly at one side, and steady training in opposition to the other side, are influences for casuistry too powerful to be matched by the best intentions. And if in the ranks of those who oppose Christianity it can be shown that they, too, have some interest that may prejudice them, let their names also be struck off. It would, indeed, be difficult to prove that any man can have as much temporal interest in opposing a wealthy and powerful conventionality as in supporting it ; but, nevertheless, in order that our verdict

may be unquestionable, we must have no special pleaders, no faintest interest that can sway the exact balances of Reason.

II.

Now, how many metaphysicians believe in the total depravity of human nature? How many philosophers, how many anthropologists believe in the utter corruption of the mind and heart of man? How many of such believe that this universal moral villainy could be inherited, to say nothing of its originating in the eating of an apple thousands of years ago? How many? Not one. I do not speak of the past, but of the present; it is my contention that, though this system may once have commanded the assent of thinkers, it is now dead to them. And I may equally demand the page written by any living writer on ethical, or legal, or religious science, or philosophy, in which is defended the idea that the human race is pardoned on condition of the physical sacrifice of an innocent being. And where is the author of our time who defends the wild notion of an eternal punishment—a punishment without end, and consequently without purpose—inflicted on millions for a sin they did not commit, and who have not even determined their own existence? These unnatural dogmas, if proved at all, must be proved by unnatural events. Such events are, of course, claimed; but what is the verdict of historical criticism upon their evidences? What is the verdict of science upon their character? They have fallen beneath criticism. They are utterly discarded

by those most competent to deal with questions involving the uniformity of nature.

Thus on every fundamental point, Christianity, as a creed or philosophy, is discarded by the Grand Jury of thought and knowledge in our time. Among those whose competency and whose disinterestedness we know Christianity is without a distinguished defender. There are indeed eminent men who call themselves Christians, and who write eulogies of Christianity without dealing with its substance. Mr. Gladstone, for instance, praises Christianity; but we do not find him ever arguing the truth of its dogmas. He never tells us his opinions on human depravity, vicarious atonement, and eternal hell-fire. But he does let us know what he thinks of the anathemas uttered by both Bible and creed on all who reject those dogmas: he has recently selected the leaders of heresy and theism for honourable mention as exceptionally good men. Such is the ablest living champion of the Church. On Sunday he repeats that the eminent heretics shall, without doubt, perish everlastingly: on Monday he writes to the "*Contemporary Review*" that they are excellent and spiritual men. Christianity says no man can be saved but by faith in the atoning blood of Christ. Mr. Martineau says he had rather be lost than saved in that way. Mr. Gladstone holds up Martineau as one of the most religious—Christian!—teachers of our time. That is what his Christianity amounts to. But where is any better defence those dogmas are receiving at present in any part of the world?

III.

When we turn to consider Christianity as a moral system, we may be content to accept the verdict of the great masses of the people. We cannot indeed accept the popular opinion as to the philological accuracy with which this or that virtue is called "Christian;" but we may look to them to declare, not by words, but by actions, whether the moral demands, the moral standard, the maxims and sanctions of Christianity are such as are good to restrain evil, promote good, and to command life. In that remarkable little book entitled "Christianity a Refined Heathenism"—written, it is said, by the Rev. Mr. Pulleyn, who was a minor Canon of Salisbury Cathedral, but was sent off on an expedition to the North Pole, to keep him, I suppose, from writing uncomfortable books—a Hindoo offers to become a convert to Christianity provided a clergyman can find a single man really living the life of Christ. The clergyman seeks vainly for a long time, but finally finds the man, as he thinks, in a poor curate who passes his time in praying before the altar of a small church, and who catches a disease, of which he dies, in visiting the sick around him. But even he did not follow Christ, for Christ resisted the established Church and priesthood of his time, and this poor curate supported both. In fact, the Hindoo made a perfectly safe offer. There is not a sane man or woman in England who fulfils the duties prescribed in the New Testament. Do these people around us turn the other cheek when one is smitten? Do they refuse to go to law against each

other? Do they give the thief another garment when he has stolen one? Do they decline to resist evil, and let scoundrels have it all their own way? Do they never ask return of him who has borrowed of them? Do they love their neighbours as themselves, and sell all they have to give it to the poor? Do they have all things in common? Do they believe their friends and children are totally depraved, and treat them as such? These instructions, we are told, must be taken in their spirit, not literally: so a Socinian may justly say, but who, believing them the words of a god, can claim that they require modification by man? But do the people—do Christians—obey even their spirit? Is it in Christ's spirit when if a man has taken our cloak we give him the cat? But does this people, or any people, credit Christ's plain affirmations about a future life? Do they lay up no treasures on earth, but only in heaven? Do they live among their neighbours as if they believed that the millions around them were destined to be tortured in everlasting fires? Do these smiling crowds show the horror, the anguish, which such belief would inevitably bring every moment to a heart of ordinary humanity? If these things be right, then is there still none that doeth good—no not one!

It matters not what compliments to Christianity may be upon the lips of the people if belief of it is not in their hearts, and if their daily lives and actions prove that its morality is unreal to them and impracticable; and that not because it is too high for them, but too low,—the survival of ascetic and fanatical systems, which, as com-

bined, could never have been practiced in any age, and were certainly not practiced by Christ.

John Robert Downes is now (1876) in a London prison for really believing the Bible. In that book he read : "Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer of faith shall save the sick and the Lord shall raise him up." Here could be no question of interpretation: St. James' prescription is perfectly plain. It was placed in the hands of Downes by Act of Parliament, as the infallible Word of God. The poor man accepted it in good faith, followed it devoutly where his little daughter lay ill: the child died. Downes is punished for not having followed the course of Asa and called in a physician, even though the Bible says Asa died because he took to the physicians instead of to the Lord. Simple minded Downes! you are in prison, but you have laid bare the hypocrisy of Christendom!

Thus, whether we listen to the conclusions of Science, Philosophy and Literature on the philosophy and the authentication of Christianity, or whether we listen to the voice of the people, as uttered in actions that speak louder than words, we receive a cumulative verdict that Christianity has a name to live, but is dead.

IV.

It remains for us to inquire why Christianity has declined.

1. Christianity tried to crush Reason, and to arrest the progress of Science. When it arose there were flourishing Schools of Science in Egypt and in Greece. There was a very important School of Jewish philosophers in Alexandria. The extent to which Professor Tyndall finds the theoretical Science of to-day germinating in the works of Lucretius, the high rank still accorded to Aristotle, to Plato, to Pliny, and others, show that important investigations into the nature of things were going on before the Church arose. Seneca writes of magnifying by glass, of refraction, and prismatic colours, the regular course of comets, and central heat of the earth, in a way that harmonises to a large extent with modern Science. Pliny writes similarly about electricity, and he says that Tullus was killed while trying to bring down lightning out of a cloud,—an experiment in which Numa seems to have anticipated Franklin by some 2,500 years! Lucan, writing before Christ, mentions similar experiments. The Phœnicians had advanced Chemistry, many nations metallurgy, and our recent discovery of toughened glass is the recovery of an art mentioned by Pliny.

Against all this research Christianity set itself. Because the schools of Philosophy were not interested in the new Jewish movement, even Paul denounced Science. He talks about the carnal mind. He says that his work is to “cast down reasonings” and bring “every thought captive into the obedience of Christ.” (2 Cor. x. 5.) We find presently Tertullian boasting that the humblest Christian mechanic knew more than all the sages of Greece; and in his picture of the Day of Judgment,

that chief sponsor of Christianity exclaims that he will admire, laugh, exult, when he sees "So many sage philosophers blushing in red hot flames with their deluded scholars; so many celebrated poets trembling before the tribunal not of Minos, but of Christ!"

Christianity having thus taken the side of ignorance against learning, fought hard for its dark fortress; but it could not nail the climbing stars; it succeeded only in making the ascent of knowledge counterpart of its own decline. The best minds grew restless. The Inquisition of Toulouse came into existence in 1229 to prevent inquiry: it ordered all heretics to be buried alive. The utmost fury of the Church was poured out on the Jews, because they maintained with logic and learning their simple monotheism against the Church. They were tortured and burnt in vast numbers. Some monks in the 12th century pretended to have found on the sepulchre of Jesus a letter from heaven demanding the immediate conversion of the Jews, and as they would not be converted the Rhine ran red with their blood. In Spain the Inquisition put to death over 300,000 heretics. All of which implies that though the Church offered up some millions of thinkers to its dark deity Ignorance,—its sole protecting providence,—yet with all that it had to wane. There appeared finally a man who invented type—the priests said he did it in league with the devil—and from that time the reign of darkness and terror began to decline.

2. Christianity has declined because the piety it tried to cultivate was inharmonious with refined and high

sentiment. Its God, demanding blood for his satisfaction, its hell, its devils, were all coarse and revolting. It was hard to worship such a deity. The Church in its ferocity imitated its God very closely. The result was that really refined and spiritual minds began to form themselves into little fraternities and orders, in which they might contemplate purer ideals, with something like masonic secrecy. A vast deal of quiet heresy went on in the Church, without any doctrinal promulgation, of that kind which finally disclosed itself in Tauler, Madame Guion, Fenelon, and others. A long history, not likely to be written, preceded those quietists and mystics. Carlyle has derived from old chronicles this significant incident of 550 years ago. In the year 1322 the Markgraf Friedrich of Misnia, having returned from his wars, and while his country was reviving under peace, was entertained at Eisenach by a dramatic representation of the "Ten Virgins." It was performed by the clergy and their scholars. "But," says the chronicle, "when it came to pass that the Wise Virgins would give the foolish no oil, and these latter were shut out from the bridegroom, they began to weep bitterly, and called on the saints to intercede for them; who, however, even with Mary at their head, could effect nothing from God; but the Foolish Virgins were all sentenced to damnation. Which things the Landgraf seeing and hearing, he fell into a doubt, and was very angry; and said 'What then is the Christian Faith, if God will not take pity on us, for intercession of Mary and all the Saints?' In this anger he continued five days; and the learned men could hardly

enlighten him to understand the Gospel. Thereupon he was struck with apoplexy, and became speechless and powerless : in which said state he continued bedrid two years and seven months, and so died, being then fifty-five." This stern mediæval warrior, dying broken-hearted at his first realization of the divine cruelty, was forerunner of the old mystics from Tauler and Thomas-a-Kempis who came soon after him, to Behmen and Swedenborg, all fleeing from the hard barbarous theology as from a City of Destruction, and taking refuge in the sweet illusion that every text and creed meant something precisely different from what it said. Madame Guion had her vision of one whom she met bearing a pitcher and a furnace, wherewith she would quench the flames of hell, and burn up Paradise, in order that God might be loved without fear or hope of reward. Fenelon was caught up with the same longing for a God of Love as his friend (Madame Guion), and for this he was with her persecuted by Bossuet and others. The Pope (Innocent VIII.) said, "Fenelon's fault is too great love of God ; his enemies' fault is too little love of their neighbour." Fenelon was degraded and exiled for preaching divine love, without making enough of demoniac terrors ; Tauler, à Kempis, Zwill, Böhme, all who aspired to a sweet mystical piety, were persecuted by the Church, though now it is ready to claim their piety and genius in its own credit.

There is nothing more subtle, more all-pervading, than the influence that flows forth from a pure exalted human being ; and when that influence is found more potent

outside of a church than inside it, and when a system is such that it has no place for that influence,—has to degrade its living in the name of its dead saints—knows nothing better to do with a Fenelon than banish him,—why it is pretty certain that the candlestick of that Church is removed out of its place.

3. Another main cause of the decline of Christianity has been the antagonism between its moral system and the laws and needs of human nature. All that was unique in the moral code of Christianity was based not on the actual wants of man but the fancied needs of God. Certain old notions inherited from a distant past that God was jealous of human pleasure and required sacrifices unrelated to man's moral advantage, had become embodied in the system. Jesus warned those around to go and learn the meaning of the saying "I desire not sacrifice but only charity," but they never did learn the meaning of it ; the vast majority do not know the meaning of it yet ; and so the Church proceeded for ages on the principle that the more happiness man or woman gave up the more was God pleased. The primitive Church was as hard, dismal, unlovely as any remote Scotch town on a Sabbath. But gradually, in the course of centuries, human nature conquered it.

Thirteen hundred years ago a handsome young man left the world and went to live in a tomb. That was his and the Church's idea of being Saint, and he was canonised as St. Benedict. There in his tomb he had a dream of a maid to whom he had been betrothed, and in his horror at such a sinful dream he rolled himself in

thorns until his body was bleeding at every pore. The jungle of thorns was thenceforth regarded as sacred, they were carefully cultivated, and people went there from all parts of the Catholic world to acquire sanctity by piercing themselves with thorns. But seven hundred years later St. Francis d'Assisi, he who used to preach to the birds as his sisters, went to visit the spot; he saw some monks lacerating themselves amid the thorns; he went away and got some roses and planted them in front of the thorns. The monks then began to attend to the roses; nay, gradually they left the thorns to wither, cultivated the others, until after a time no thorns remained but roses only. Just seven centuries the lesson took, that a rose is as sacred as a thorn! The story is a fair type of how human nature steadily conquered the dismal asceticism and thornworship of the Church. The asceticism lingered only in nunneries and monasteries; the people and their priests together mingled in dances and festivals. But all this meant the decline of Christianity, which in its essence was opposed to joy, opposed to marriage, and overshadowed life with apprehensions for the present and terrors of the future.

Puritanism, both in Germany and England, attempted to revive the old asceticism, but they are going the same way. Their ugly Sabbath is departing; their dismal temples are being adorned; their rigid exactions of human nature are being relaxed; but all of these features of liberalism are contrary to Christianity,—in plain discord with its dogmas, which teach horror of this world as a thing accursed, horror of human nature as corrupt,


and the fearful apprehension of fiery torments awaiting us all.

V.

These are a few of the many causes which superinduced the decline of Christianity. Those causes mastered the Church as it existed before the Reformation. The discovery of printing, and the speedy diffusion of the Bible, shattered the Church ; but each of the many sects which started up under the Reformation repeated something of the same kind, as it were, in embryonic phases. An effort was made to cast human life again in the old Syrian moulds prescribed by the Bible, and by Christian traditions. The whole world judaised. But it has been with the same result. Christianity in its Protestant forms has tried to renew some things that the Catholic Church has unlearned by long and costly experience. It came into sharp collision with the needs of everyday life, with the pursuit of wealth, with the enterprise of the world. It is now taught to a world that cannot believe, and cannot practice it. The reality of it has passed away. Its name now represents only the effort of a lucrative institution to survive into and through a civilization built up point for point against its protest and its errors. That effort may continue for a time, but it is hopeless.

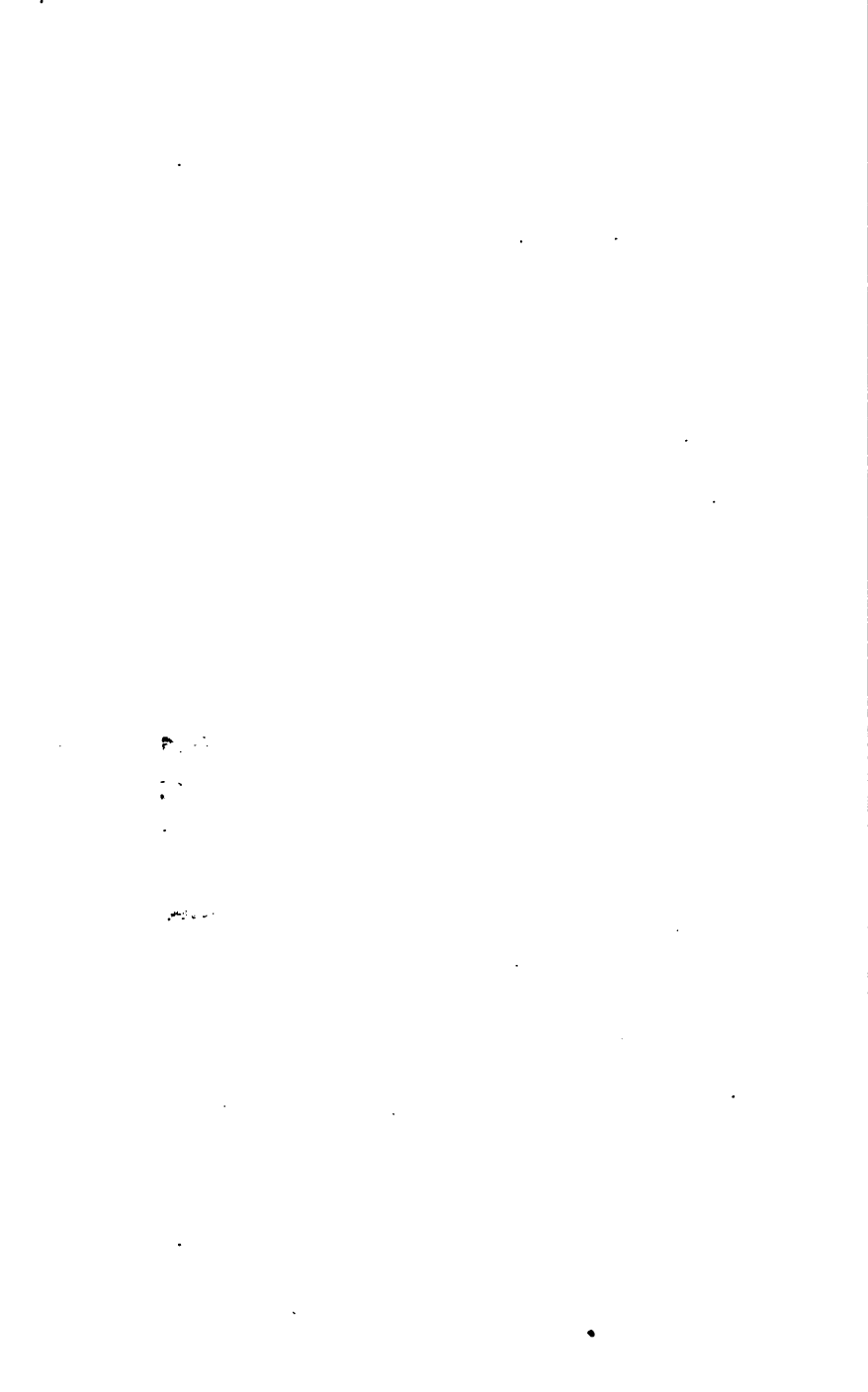
There is a Scandinavian fable which illustrates the subtlety of those forces which bring death to a thing leaving it for a little the form and semblance of life. Mimir, the craftsman, was challenged by another craftsman, Amilias, who boasted that he had made

a suit of armour which no stroke could dint, to equal that feat, or own [him the second smith then living. Then Mimir forged a sword so fine of edge that it cut a thread of wool floating on the water. Dissatisfied with that, Mimir broke the blade to pieces, welded in red hot fire for three days, tempered it with milk, and brought out a sword that severed a ball of wool floating on the water. But still the edge was blunt to Mimir: he returned to his smithy, and worked in secret, and by means unknown to any but himself he fashioned the sword Mimung. And now Amilias, encased in his impenetrable armour, sat down in presence of assembled thousands, and bade Mimir strike him. Mimir struck with his sword; the blow was noiseless; after it the craftsman who had been struck merely remarked that he felt strangely. Whereon Mimir said, "Shake thyself." Amilias did so, and he fell in two halves, never to swing hammer more. This may be originally the fable of a giant iceberg, smitten by a sunbeam, parting asunder; but it is the history also of the spiritual sunbeam whose touch may seem to leave some great error unharmed, when the first agitation will reveal that it is cloven asunder,—dead.



v.

ITS AFTERGLOW.





ITS AFTERGLOW.

I.



A SALIENT characteristic of this century has been the effort to restate Christianity in some way that would secure it from that hard collision with the best tendencies of the age into which Catholicism and Calvinism alike had brought it. When Independence was born in America a hundred years ago, it recognised instinctively the foe of Liberty ; it launched its bolt straight at the throne of Christianity, destroying its authority in civil government, affirming that the true society could only be built up in freedom from its interference, in direct reversal of the assumption of ages that all government and civilisation must be based upon it. When that Republic entered upon this century, its progress was already sufficient to justify the brave free-thinkers who founded it. Every people of the old world knew, every priest knew, that free and happy societies were growing up in the New World, with order, arts, and education, unfettered by the ecclesiastical systems and creeds which had so long pretended to carry with them the favours of Heaven. The present Archbishop of Canterbury once defended the

union of Church and State in this country, by pointing out that in America their severance had naturally led to the growth of Socinianism. It was a very ingenuous argument, and has the advantage of being true. Liberated from all disabilities imposed on free inquiry, no longer bribed by the social or pecuniary endowments of an established creed, the human mind found in America its first opportunity to prosecute freely and fully those religions, revisions, and criticisms which gained a certain embodiment in Unitarianism. This movement is to be distinguished from all the radicalism and iconoclasm of France, England, and America which preceded it, and conquered for it the liberty under which it could grow. It was, in both England and America, a movement in the interest of Christianity, not against it. The Unitarians believed that the common theology represented not real Christianity but its abuses. They were encouraged in this belief by the important discovery that the great central dogma of all the churches—the Trinity—was totally unfounded and unscriptural.

An earnest, honest and learned criticism, turned during the last generation to the work of searching out the genuine text of the New Testament and its real sense, has amply justified the misgivings of the Unitarians as to the scriptural authenticity of the dogmas of orthodox Christianity. The task crowned by the splendid discovery of the Codex Sinaiticus by Von Tischendorf and the invaluable critical labours of that scholar, may be regarded as nearly complete ; and the pious frauds of fifty generations are nearly exposed. A story is told of a clergyman,

who, in conversation with a Unitarian fellow-traveller urged against him the text of the Three Heavenly Witnesses. "Is it possible," said the Unitarian, "that you do not know that the text is a forgery?" "Well, yes," replied the clergyman, "but I didn't know you knew it." That candid clergyman had but attempted to carry on in an age when it is not so safe the old priestly plan of theologically manipulating the Bible while that book was reserved for the clergy's exclusive inspection. Porson ninety years ago pointed out that no Greek MSS., but only the Vulgate, had anything about the three witnesses, and so expunged from every honest Bible the only text that even faintly suggested a Trinity.

It has now been proved that it is equally by fraud that the idea of the incarnation of God in Christ has been imported into the New Testament. For those who have not at hand Von Tischendorf's last revision, and Dr. Davidson's introduction to his own excellent translation of it, I may here mention the more salient instances in which the readers of the English version are deceived with regard to the sense of the New Testament on important points. In Col. ii, 2, "God, even Christ,"—"Christ" is a gloss. In Rom. ix, 5, we have the phrase "Christ *came*, who is over all God blessed for ever;" the word "came" has been supplied by the translators, a period has been withheld where usage renders it natural; and the true reading is: "Whose are the fathers, and of whom is Christ after the flesh. God, who is over all, be blessed for ever. Amen." In Titus ii, 13, usage equally requires a comma to divide two parts of a sentence skilfully

welded together : instead of "The glorious appearing of our Great God and Saviour Jesus Christ," the comma which would have certainly appeared in an undoctinal text makes it the "appearing of our Great God, and of our Saviour Jesus Christ." In Luke xxiv, 51-2, the words stating that Jesus was "carried up into heaven, and they worshipped him" are not genuine. In Phil ii, 6, instead of Christ's being said to have "thought it not robbery to be equal with God," the rendering is he "did not think equality with God a thing to be grasped at." In 1 Tim. iii, 16, "God was manifest in the flesh" has been made out by an ingenious change of the Greek *ὅς* (who) into *Θεός* (God). How far the English translators were parties to such frauds we cannot tell, though we must suspect that they knowingly perverted some important texts,—e.g., 2 Tim. iii, 16, where "Every scripture inspired by God, is profitable" is made to read that "all scripture *is* given by God, and is profitable." Those translators excluded from their work the ablest Hebrew scholar of the time (Broughton) whose honesty was too pronounced ; and it is not a happy augury of veracity in the coming revised translation, that the friend of Von Tischendorf, the learned and incorruptible Dr. Samuel Davidson, should have no part in it.

The dogmas of a Trinity and the co-eternal deity of Christ being discovered to have been impositions on the Bible, the general authenticity of the book has been weakened. But while the earlier Unitarians maintained the inspiration of the book, they saw that the most momentous dogmas were not so clearly stated in it, that

one need give them entire credence. There were texts for them, indeed, but also texts against them. Some of these dogmas were morally repulsive,—such as atonement through the blood of Christ, and the eternal and physical character of Hell,—and when Christianity was relieved of these it presented a very different aspect. When the more deforming dogmas were removed many a long hidden treasure was revealed. The beautiful discourses and parables of Christ, his pure life, his heroic fidelity, his martyrdom, acquired an impressiveness which they could never possess while they were all merely incidental—at best ancillary—to the awful and mysterious doctrines by which alone it was said, men were to be saved from eternal anguish. It was inevitable that the system should be seen and judged apart from its worst corruptions. This necessity appeared in various countries, and, leaving now the sectarian embodiments of it, we may say that there flowered out of the most living branch of Christendom what is called Liberal Christianity. This is the Afterglow of that day which has set,—sequel of the thousand years in which the system in its ecclesiastical and dogmatic forms had ruled, and then reigned, and finally declined.

II.

It would be difficult to set too high an estimate upon the learning and industry which have been brought to the task thus briefly described: inestimable has been the light cast upon the life and character of Christ, and the history of his time. No dawn ever broke from the

East more resplendent than that with which the research of the West has flooded the East itself. But as it has proceeded one thing has become increasingly plain, namely, that Liberal Christianity is no real dawn at all, but a brief Afterglow.

It began to waver almost as soon as it arose. Thus, when it was discovered that the Trinity is an unfounded dogma, the question had to be met; what, then, is the real teaching of the New Testament concerning Christ? The Bible is not Trinitarian, but is it Unitarian? Certainly not, that is in the ordinary sense of that term. The New Testament writers have various views of Jesus: one believes him the Jewish Messiah; another believes him the personified creative energy of God; another thinks him a mysterious divine emanation; but there is no warrant in that book for believing Jesus to have been merely human in his nature. No mere man would have said "My father is greater than I," or "I am the resurrection and the life." Then the New Testament is full of miracles, which cannot be denied without tearing the book to pieces: especially do all the hopes held out by it to believers centre in the bodily resurrection of Christ from death. Now all these things were as shocking to reason as the dogmas of God's wrath and hell-fire had been to moral sentiment. To men who had begun to think, there was something repugnant in this idea of a deity working through a secondary personage, and something inconsistent with simplicity and nature in the idea of primogeniture introduced with the notion of a specially favoured, beloved, or only-begotten son of God. So the

next step had inevitably to be taken, This was to impeach the accuracy and authority of the record, to claim that it was written after popular tradition by superstitious men, each with some theory to support ; and yet hold that there is reflected in it the wisdom and greatness of Christ with sufficient clearness to constitute the essence of a religion. It was still maintained by some, and is now, that even after the miracles are gone, and the supernatural authentication of both Bible and Christ gone, and Jesus stands simply as a good and wise man, and a martyr, there may yet remain a system of Christianity worthy to be maintained and extended as the right religion of mankind.

In all this one thing was clear, namely that some motives were at work, whether consciously or not, beyond love of truth, to induce men to hold on so pertinaciously to the Christian name after it had ceased to represent a living and credible thing. These motives have been abundantly displayed in recent controversies. Some of them are very poor indeed. To one, Christianity seems to be a kind of spell, the very name having become a fetish. I do not know that such are to be held responsible for their word-worship, for ages of superstition have cast the mould of their brains. But argument would be wasted on them. They are like those who gather at Rome around the Bambino of Ara Coeli, the little effigy of Christ said to have been carved out of an olive-tree on the Mount of Olives, and painted by St. Luke : even now some devotees believe that the security of pontifical Rome depends on that very ugly Bambino, though it was that which dis-

gusted Gibbon as he looked upon its worship, and led him to write the history which was one of the first blows that weakened not only the pontificate but Christianity itself. Others hold on to Christianity because it is a name to conjure with. He who drops it loses what is called politely *prestige*, so called by persons who do not reflect that *prestige* is a foreign word meaning deceit. Though we reject the authority of Christianity as a history and a system of truth, we must keep up the name for its popularity! This is too much in the vein of Mephistopheles who advises Faust to "take care of words, and leave things to themselves." We need not consider his advice, nor that of those who praise Christianity for the sake of the people, when they know that the word means to the people a totally different thing from what it means to them. Others hold on to the word for political reasons. Great national interests have become bound up with the Christian religion, and they think these can be preserved only so long as the name lasts; so they wish us to think as we please, but only call our thoughts Christianity. But we may feel pretty sure that any interest which rests upon so transparent a falsehood will have to find a better basis, or else fall, some time or other, and it may as well be now as at any other time. It need not stand on the order of its going! And the same may be said to those who dread the moral consequences upon the masses of their discovery of the long deception which has been practised upon them. The greater danger, surely, will arise from trying to continue the deception after it has been exposed. When the time came in Rome

when two soothsayers could not meet each other without laughing, Rome had not much farther to go before her fall. And we find much the same state of things here, when eminent clergymen are driven to apologise for calling themselves Christians, and others smile at creeds they are under oath to preach.

Somewhat more honourable, but still quite fanciful, is the motive of those who hold on to the Christian name because they think it necessary in order to preserve the continuity of our religious development. They maintain that though the England of Charles I. is very different from the England of Victoria, yet there is a national continuity preserved with the old name and the old flag; and so, they maintain, the evolution of religion must go on under the old Christian name and its symbols. Even were it admissible that religion should be compared with a national life, there is a fallacy in supposing that the real continuity of a nation depends upon a name or a flag. Under various names,—Britain, Albion, England,—under many flags, this nation has preserved its continuity and its greatness. Even in a nation, continuity is just the thing that cannot be broken. It is like the individuality of a man who, though he may pass under a pet name in his childhood, a nickname in his boyhood, a family name in his youth, a title in his manhood, is the same man through all. But apart from this, we contend that it is the peculiar glory of a religion that it is not national, nor even ethnical, but human. Unless the absurdity be contended for that Christianity represents a world-evolution its continuity can only mean the self-righteousness of

a group of nations or races, in which case the theory aims a blow at that continuity of the Religion of Humanity, which a miserable sectarianism denies. Humanity cries out in our age, "While one says, 'I am of Buddha,' another, 'I am of Mohammed,' another, 'I am of Christ,' are ye not all sectarian and self-righteous?"

III.

I know that the men who hold the Christian name on this fanciful theory of "continuity" are not consciously sectarian; but however broad or human they may be individually, their tribute to the religion of a single race is finally delivered into the hands of the narrowest form of their religion,—the form in which it is understood by the masses, and maintained by all Christian priesthoods. Some years ago the noble Garibaldi, by his heroism, won a magnificent victory for the freedom of Italy from Papal tyranny, against the will of his king, who was held fast by his master in France, Napoleon III. who, in turn, was pledged to uphold his master, the Pope, and not allow the King of Italy to invade his dominions. But when Garibaldi gained his victory, and all Italy was filled with enthusiasm, the king of that country was unable to suppress him, or to restore the conquered province to the Pope, because of the people. But the thing was managed in this way. A very liberal Italian minister negotiated with Garibaldi to deliver the advantage he had won into his highly liberal hands. Garibaldi could not doubt that in the hands of such a liberal minister the cause would

be safe. But when the minister received it, he gave it to his master the king; the king gave it up to his master the French Emperor; the Emperor gave it up to his master, the Pope; and thus the grand achievement of Garibaldi travelled through all the degrees until it strengthened the very tyranny at which his blow was aimed. It is very much the same with the great achievements for freedom of modern Christian liberalism. Some great rationalist wins his province for freedom, and delivers it up to Unitarian Christianity, where its negations are left, and its admissions seized by Nonconformists to reinforce orthodoxy, or the Broad Church steals its fire to give a new lease of life to the Established Church. Thus the rationalist who consents to call himself a Christian, in the very proportion that he is able and eminent, is sending fresh power to prop the throne of superstition. Whatever Christianity may mean at the apex, at the base it means certain gross superstitions and horrible dogmas; those it will represent to the masses; but how can the ignorant be delivered, when it is competent for any priest or preacher to tell them that such and such great scholars and thinkers are Christians? "What!" cries the preacher to the poor working man, who begins to doubt the horrible dogmas "do you think you know more than Professor Newman, who has joined an organisation for 'the promotion of the principles of Unitarian Christianity,' or than Martineau, who admits Christianity to be true, or more than Dean Stanley, or Bishop Colenso, Dr. Jowett, and other great Christians?" The preacher is suppressing truth, suggesting falsehood: no one of the men he names believes the

Christianity which he is imposing on that working man : yet it is those great men themselves who, by using a title of double meaning, enable the double-tongued to forge from their reputation new chains for the human mind. Nor can they prevent this result so long as they profess belief in Christianity. All their refined qualifications, their textual criticisms, their philosophisings about continuity, and the rest, have no relation to the common sense and daily life of mankind. And it is most wonderful that they do not see that a religion which requires all those "ifs" and "buts," and requires critical commentaries in order to be made true, is thereby disqualified from being a faith for mankind. It is an infatuation to think that a religion can be real to masses of men which is anywise dependent on ancient Hebrew and Greek books, or upon the scholastic criticism and metaphysics of this or any other age.

IV.

Consider the various theories that have arisen under the Atterglow. One says, "Christianity means love to God and love to man. Christ himself says, On those two things hang all the law and the prophets." But, we ask, how about Christ's other sayings, that men must be saved by believing on him, and if they do not believe on him, must go into eternal despair, where the worm never dies, and the fire is not quenched? Oh, they argue, Christ doesn't mean that ; he means something else than that : he means the fire *will* be quenched, the worm *will* die. Very possibly. No doubt examination of the original

Greek, and a long drill in exegesis and hermeneutics, will enable my neighbour the blacksmith to find that the texts must be modified. But he may wish a religion adapted to a poor man who doesn't know Greek, and who, if he is to depend on authority at all, will naturally depend, not on ours, but that of the sect in which he was born.

Another theorist tells us that Christianity means the "Fatherhood of God and Brotherhood of Man." But, we urge, Christ several times repudiated that brotherhood, declared that the Jews were chosen above all races, called the alien Canaanites "dogs," who had no right to the religious advantages of Jews, told his apostles to have nothing to do with the Gentiles. "Ah, but those texts occur in doubtful books, and they don't mean what they seem to say." Very likely not, I answer; but how can you maintain before the uncritical masses that Christianity teaches human brotherhood, when the only books they have about Christ make him teach the contrary, and when the whole history of Christianity shows its representatives hating and killing others in its name?

Then a third comes forward to affirm that the life and character of Christ were perfect, and that these supply the basis of a credible Christianity. What man needs is a perfect human and divine type, and Christ is that. But where do they find such a Christ? They have to evolve him from their inner consciousness, or by elaborate comparative criticism, for certainly no such being is plainly reported in the Bible. The Christ of the New Testament is obviously egotistical and fanatical. He attacks with physical violence persons engaged in an honest calling.

and injures their property ; he denounces his neighbours as vipers and children of hell ; he believes in ghosts, devils, and in eternal fires for a portion of the human family. If we turn from that Christ to another aspect in which he is represented, he is equally a type of character which no man would wish his son to imitate. Unresisting even to abjectness, asserting his own perfections to such an extent that his meekness becomes affectation, telling us himself that he said a thing merely for effect, decrying the world, denouncing the rich, denying the affections, even turning away with contempt from his mother and sisters, we see in this other Christ a type of character perfunctory and spiritless. Now, understand, I do not believe in the least that such were the real characteristics of Christ ; I believe that the various types of character ascribed to him would be impossible in any one man, and am quite sure that they are mere sectarian theories, asceticisms, fanaticisms of the time personified, and called by Christ's name for the same reason that people still call their little schemes and schools Christianity,—that is, because the name carried weight among the people they wished to conciliate. But though we can by elaborate criticism relieve Christ personally of most of these faults and find a great heroic man there (though no model) it can only be done by abandoning Christianity in any conceivable shape. For if we deny that he is responsible for the gross demonology and violent conduct ascribed to him, we are left without any record of his virtue which may not be equally denied. So soon as we found a system on him we challenge such denial from rival systems. It

is dishonest to go through the New Testament and put everything you like on one side, and all you dislike on the other, and say one parcel is true and the other false, That is using false weights and measures. Where would science be if men of science decided on the facts of Nature by their preferences, and a man were permitted to discredit a discovered law because he had a distaste for it? What should we say of a judge who should charge a jury to believe so much of the evidence as they found it comfortable to believe? This kind of dishonesty, scorned everywhere else, is even the general rule in theological discussion. This is proved by the fact that Christians, even liberal ministers, do not hesitate to label all the virtues "Christian,"—Christian charity, Christian liberty, and I wonder they do not say Christian gravitation and electricity,—when they know that there is not one moral law or maxim of Christianity which was not the common currency of all great religions before the birth of Christ. Nor do they hesitate to speak of pagan darkness and heathen idolatry as if other religions monopolised ignorance and superstition, while Christianity monopolised the excellencies and the light. All of which is dishonest and immoral. Christ's assault on them that sold doves is as much a part of the Bible as Paul's chapter on charity. Mohammed's chapter on charity is as much a part of his religion as his paradise of pleasure. Men have no right to take their own system at its best and that of others at its worst.

V.

Such injustice, such unfair glozing over of difficulties,

are the signs of a system in decay. No longer able to live by fair means it has recourse to means not fair. There are painful indications that the Afterglow is following the plan of the dogmatic day which preceded it, trying to prolong itself artificially by deliberately discouraging honesty of research. The Unitarians of England and America have done their utmost to make Christianity consistent with truth and freedom, but they have shown that it is impossible. If I apply to the Unitarian Association they will admit me only under a rule that makes me say I am a Christian. It may be a falsehood, but they will not investigate that ; or it may be that my Christianity would be of that kind which would burn a freethinker as Calvin burned Servetus, and yet I shall be admitted ; but if I frankly say, "I believe in God and in immortality ; I love Christ and regard him as the best and wisest of men, and yet I do not think it honest to say I am a Christian,"—then the fundamental law of their organisation excludes me. By so doing they encourage me to tell a lie. Every young liberal offered their aid and sympathy on condition of pronouncing their shibboleth—"Christianity"—is encouraged to shape his faith to suit his interest. So all their professed liberality, all their publication of the works of dead radicals like Parker, cannot atone for the daily and hourly wrong they inflict on the living by dishonouring the principle of veracity and fidelity, by rewarding compliance with their creed, and punishing, however indirectly, the independence which will not pronounce it. Theodore Parker did not find it his duty to disown the Christian name ; but there are others who do find it a

duty to do so, and among these the congregation he founded, and nine-tenths of those who knew and sympathised with him while he was living. These believe, however mistakenly, that they represent a tendency of the religious life of our time. What cheer has Unitarianism for these? The English Unitarians have an honourable history, and no page of it is brighter than the last; but they can retain what they have won only by following up their advance. They have reduced the ancient chain on thought to one link—the Christian name,—but that, unless broken, will increasingly preserve in it all the galling intolerance of the links that are destroyed.

The painful warrior, famousèd for fight,
After a thousand victories once foiled,
Is from the books of honour razed quite,
And all the rest forgot for which he toiled.

A fundamental rule declares the object of their Association (all the world can judge them by) to be “promotion of the principles of Unitarian Christianity;” under it all the Brahmos of India, with Sen and Mozoomdar, all the Theists, Jews, rationalists,—George Eliot, Carlyle, Spencer, Tyndall, Huxley, Thomas Scott, Kalisch, Miss Cobbe,—are excluded. And this is the religion of love to man,—of Fatherhood and Brotherhood!

No, it is the mere Afterglow of a Religion, preserving, even in its faint ghostly light, enough of the semblance of the old dogmatic day which has set, to remind us of the essential errors by which Christianity has perished. It is not within the power of any mind, however ingenious, to

liberalise Christianity so far that it will include all humanity in an equal embrace,—Jews and Gentiles, Hindoos, Mohammedans, Buddhists—and draw no line against any man's convictions.

Nor is it yet in the power of any to frame any definition of Christianity, however liberal, which will not rest upon the fatal figment that our race culminated religiously in a small superstitious tribe of Syria over 1800 years ago. We may progress in science, literature, and the arts ; but in religion progress ended in Palestine, and the highest civilization must always look backwards, not forwards, for its highest light, truth, and life !

It is on the ruins of that sectarian wall between man and man, on the grave of that retrogressive superstition that Religion now takes her stand to wait and watch for the morning.



VI.

THE MORROW.





THE MORROW.

I.

THERE is a fallacy, surviving even among educated people, as a vague feeling, that there is some causative connection between Christianity and the higher civilisation of the chief nations which profess it. This, we know, is the main argument of the missionary: he confounds the oriental man by claiming all the science, literature, and arts of Europe as the fruits of Christianity, thereby compelling all of our men of science and culture—though denounced for materialism here—to sanction the dogmas which our sects are sending out there.

It has been already pointed out that there was reflected in Christianity a more refined type of woman, and a higher recognition of her moral influence, by reason of its ideal Madonna, than existed in the European religions which it superseded, though under those women had larger political rights; also that it held the germs of a higher political *régime* in its doctrine of the equality of souls before God; and it taught the dignity of labour in its theory that Christ was a poor mechanic. But it would

be a serious error to suppose that such ideas are contained only in Christianity. Other and earlier religions have their Madonnas, and their deities incarnate in humble forms, and taught human equality; and if any other of those religions had happened to get the mastery of Europe the same ideas would have been selected out of them. It is race, time, circumstance, which keep the same ideas dormant in one place and develop them in another. These determine religious forms, immeasurably more than religious forms determine them.

As proof of this we have only to consider the condition of Christianity among other races than our own. Forty-five years ago a young man who had graduated with the highest honours at Oxford, filled with zeal for the spread of Christianity, went as a missionary to Aleppo. He lived there and in various regions of the Ottoman empire, where he could fully compare those of his own faith with Moslems. There were Christians of all kinds and degrees. The letters written home by that earnest and orthodox missionary were published in 1856,* and I fear the book is now out of print. He found that the animosities of the Christians to each other rendered them helpless before the united Turks, and yet that the Turks were anxious to reconcile the Christians—Greek, Roman Catholic, Syriac, and the rest—to each other. While conscious of a desire that Turkish Government should be overthrown, the missionary sees no chance of a

* Personal Narrative, in Letters, principally from Turkey, in the years 1830-3. By F. W. Newman. London: Holyoake & Co., Fleet Street. 1856.

worthier successor, "no mark in the Christians of higher qualities." They are "neither strong nor wise nor ingenious nor active-minded." The Turks leave to them freedom of the press, yet the Christians have no books and their intellects were wholly uninstructed. He says that the missionaries there have to leave the Turks and try to convert the Christians. He and the other zealous missionaries with him shrank from the native Christians as "dangerous and faithless allies," and finally they relinquished the idea of building a church there, and came home disheartened.

This is the testimony of one who when he wrote it, and for some time afterwards, was a Christian zealot,—Professor Newman. It shows that low races find their barbarism harmonious with Christianity while advanced races are crediting it with their civilisation.

The Nestorian Christian will kill a man if he works on Sunday. He finds in the book given him as the Word of God as ample warrant for his barbarism as an Englishman can find in it for his civility. And just the same is true of all other religions.

Mohammedanism, which among Turks turns to a cruel superstition, once blossomed in Persia to a beautiful mystical religion represented by the finest literary age known to Asia.

II.

Professor Newman has related in another work ("Phases of Faith") the impression made upon his mind by a Mussulman mechanic who, having listened to

his instruction, remarked that while the English seemed to be superior in everything else, they certainly did not possess a true religion. The devout Oxonian Scholar returned to England with that humble workman's word, and it was a seed cast in the mind of the sower who went forth to sow, among the many which have since borne fruit a hundredfold.

That Mohammedan laid his hand upon the fundamental anomaly of this country. We are a civilised country in everything but one, that is religion ; that is barbarous. Its dogmas are derived from barbarous tribes and ages. We do not use their ploughs nor other implements ; we do not adopt their science nor their arts ; but we establish in the School and the Church their wild superstitions of a world accursed, man vicariously depraved and vicariously redeemed, a deity demanding blood, and a hell of fire and brimstone. Educated people even in the Churches confess the barbarism of these beliefs by declaring, whenever we state them, that we are caricaturing their faith. We quote them word for word from their creeds and confessions ; and yet they say it is misrepresentation and caricature. No doubt it misrepresents them, and it certainly caricatures civilised humanity ; but there are the Creeds in the Prayer-book, and in dissenting Confessions, in the Catechisms taught to every generation, and any one may read them. Whatever the educated may secretly read in the dogmas, such is their plain meaning to the child and the unlettered millions.

Now, why is it that civilised England teaches her people a barbarous religion ? It is because all progress in civilisa-

tion must be by free comparison and selection. In Science we compare fact with fact, theory with theory, and select that which best explains phenomena. If a man made a discovery in India the English man of science does not refuse it because he was a Brahman. In Philosophy we do not reject a statement by Aristotle because he was a "pagan." We do not in trade refuse the products of Africa, Japan, or any country, because they are from non-Christian producers. And so, freely combining the select advantages of the world, we attain a high material and scientific civilisation. We absorb Greece, Rome, Scandinavia, into our literature. We follow the ancient evolutionary law of nature, which combined all animal excellences into man,—“the sum of every creature’s best;” and which combines single races to make higher races. In religion alone we have arrested the action of this civilising eclectic law upon us. We have isolated our religion, rejected all contributions and criticisms from other religions, cut off the natural streams of influence that would have fed and enlarged it, and compelled the law of progress to pass on over its grave.

It is no consolation to know that all other religions have done the same, as far as they can. It is too true. Every historic religion has detached itself from the living body of humanity, and made itself a mere fragment; each takes up its bit of the dissected map of world-experience and cries, “behold here the round world and all that dwell therein!” There is not a Bible of any race which can be understood without comparison with some other Bible which its devotees scornfully reject. There is no

religious prophet or teacher whose words are not made false if he is seen in dislocation, dissociated from other teachers of his time, and set up in rivalry to them. All religions in the world are now crumbling, and all for the same reason. There is a longing for unity among races, and their sects are sundering them. The expansion of commerce has revealed intellectual and moral treasures in every land: while scholars seek them, priesthoods guard them from exportation and importation. Everywhere sectarianism still stands in the way of the free spiritual commerce of race with race, and the gathering together thereby of the accumulated experiences of all climes and ages, which alone can make a religious civilisation.

III.

But observe now all the signs of our time which tell us what the morrow must be, and what its glorious task!

Within this century the Bible Society has distributed through the world, translated into 150 languages, 131,000,000 Bibles. Yet in a thousand years Christianity has not made one million converts among those "pagan" races who are so glad to get the Bible. Why is that? Simply because the Bible is a human book for any mind that can read it with freedom. Christianity means that it shall not be read as a human book, nor with freedom, but that people must read into it, or extort out of it, certain things which will prove English sects right and all the rest of the world wrong. But the Hindoo, the Arab, do not want any more compulsion of

that kind. They have had enough of that. That is just the way they have been reading the Vedas and the Koran, not to find what was truly there, but what it suited their rulers should be found there. Now this distribution of Bibles from England gives them exactly what they need, a great sacred literature which they can read as free reasoning beings, under no compulsion to believe its legends or construct dogmas out of its poetry. Those Bibles will, in the end, liberate them from thralldom to the letter of their own books. It will supply keys to their Scriptures, and unseal the eyes of millions to see that truth and beauty are monopolised by no race on earth. As for Christ, reverence for him in the East has not had to wait for the diffusion of the Bible. For many centuries oriental writers have held him in love and honour as a great and good teacher, and they have some beautiful traditions concerning him unknown to the West. They reject with indignation the notion that Jesus was a Christian. The Jews know that. Not long ago I met a Rabbi and he said to me, "Jesus was a great Jew, and if he were to reappear in Christendom he would be invited to preach in all the Synagogues, and crucified in all the Churches." With what terms of admiration do Keshub Chunder Sen and the Brahmos, and Moulvi Syed Ameer Ali, in his "Life of Mohammed," speak of Christ ! And yet they never dream of becoming Christians, which would mean identifying Christ and themselves with all the wickedness and cruelties of Christian history, and with the vulgar dogmas of missionaries,—dogmas just as repulsive as their own. The Bible and Christ are wel-

comed among them as liberators: Christianity comes trying to forge both into fresh chains for them, and it is rejected.

But while the Bible Society is thus breaking sectarian chains for the rest of the world, what is to break the chains of the people here at home? There are very few readers of the Bible in this country who get at its real meaning. It requires a great deal of comparison with other books,—the New Testament as well as the Old. Even if people try to read intelligently they have so long been reading it with prepossessions derived from ignorant preachers that every sentence reflects their own prejudice instead of the thought that wrote it. What we need here is precisely what they need there, namely Bibles that we may read freely, under no compulsion to believe their fables, nor to read out of them what is not in them, to suit the exigencies of systems. We shall learn that in every age and nation truth has been shining abroad like the sunlight, and beneath it have everywhere bloomed the flowers of virtue. We shall learn what are weeds in our own soil by seeing the corresponding weeds, flourishing where we are not bribed by any interest or custom to pronounce them flowers or fruits. The Bibles of the world will mutually unlock each other, and a great interchange of world-experiences take place from which universal religion shall emerge.

I hold it a great promise of the morrow that a German orientalist, naturalised in England, and associated with its oldest University (Professor Max Müller), has summoned the scholars of Europe to translate into every Western

language the Bibles of the world. They have responded and are now at their work. When those books are gathered together they who now hear only the voice of Syria and Greece will hear the voice of Humanity. We shall learn that errors which have gained new vigour in the West by being grafted on our civilisation, have flourished in many lands ages ago, have been tried and found wanting, and that what we have been sending out to ancient races as divine truth have been the extinct fossils of their own fabulous ages.

The Morrow, then, will not take away our Bible. On the contrary it will for the first time really give us our Bible, by illuminating it. It will enlarge it by adding to it the manifold Scriptures, now rejected, which make up the canon of revelation to Humanity.

IV.

Nor will the Morrow take away Christ. It will restore him to the World from which patristic metaphysics have removed him. It will no longer be considered any degradation to call him a man. He will be seen as one of a high and holy fraternity of seers and teachers, stretching through all ages, whom no one race can claim, who speak for universal reason and right.

Every new day must build on the work of the days that have passed and sum them up to its larger total. The day that has passed of every religion has been sectarian, national; but that means also that there has been a distribution of labour. It was not without its

value. Each race has given its wealth and learning to the work of preserving and popularising its own records and traditions to an extent which could only have resulted from a belief that the whole of truth was with them. They builded better than they knew. They have each brought their little block of stone, under impression that it was the whole temple, to a point where comparative study may take it up and fit it to every other block, that the sacred edifice of Humanity may arise.

Already we have discovered signs of the universality of the great Teachers with which the sects of the world label themselves so exclusively. One sign is the moral names they bear. It is rare that any great religious founder bears the name given him by his family, or a name distinctive of his tribe or nation. Their names are titles conferred by the moral sense and enthusiasm of mankind. Sakya Muni lives in the ages as Buddha,—the enlightened. The great Hindoo law-giver bears the Vedic name Manu, signifying the Father of Mankind. The family name Ahmed becomes Mohammed, “the praised.” We do not know the original names of some great religious teachers,—Zoroaster, for instance, a title variously interpreted. Nor do we know the name first given to Christ. Jesus (meaning Saviour) and Christ (the anointed) are manifestly titles bestowed after his work had ended and his greatness been recognised. Thus in their very names these men are signed with their relation to the moral consciousness of man, and raised out of the national into the universal spirit.

Another notable fact is this. The influence of the greatest religious Teachers has been felt mainly in other countries than their own. Not in India, Buddha's native land, does Buddhism flourish; the religion of Zoroaster is almost unknown in Persia, where it originated; neither Moses nor Christ is the chosen prophet of Palestine. This rule, like the other, is not invariable, but it is general enough to verify the ancient proverb that a prophet is not without honour save in his own country. Nor is the reason far to seek. Partly, no doubt, it is because no mass of people have the culture required to recognise greatness in guise of the familiar; but mainly it is because the great man always comes as a reformer, and is brought into immediate collision with the prejudices, priesthoods, powers of his own locality. His local warfare is left behind when his words travel to other regions. The Pharisees of England never dream that Christ meant them when he rebuked their class in Jerusalem. Garibaldi was welcomed by lords in England, but many an English Garibaldi has been despised and rejected. The facts show that all men hunger and thirst for truth, and always welcome it when permitted to receive it; and their rulers more readily permit it when it comes as foreign learning than when it involves internal reform and schism. They also show that the power by which the great prevail is a pure human power, detached from local complications, freed from tribal and sectarian paltriness. Thus the teacher whom Judea crucified triumphed in Greece and Rome under the Græco-Roman name of Christ; and he did so through the force of

another great man who cast aside his provincialism even to his name, Saul,* and went forth to translate Jesus from a person to a spirit and restate his doctrine so that it might become, in a high sense, all things to all men. That was the culmination of Christ's true influence: it has been already related how his spirit passed away and his lifeless form was entombed in Christianity.

But behold a third badge of the great religious Teachers. Each nation preserves the legends and marvels connected with the founder of its own religion, because it thinks that these give him an authority above all the other prophets. But now comes Comparative Mythology, and shows the legends and marvels to be substantially the same. The legends of Moses, Zoroaster, Buddha, and Christ so closely resemble each other that they cease to give a distinctive authority to either, so far as his teaching claims to reveal things beyond universal reason. Jesus descended from heaven, was born of a virgin named Mary, wrought miracles, and ascended to heaven from the top of the Mount of Olives where Catholics still worship his last footprint on earth. But it was already on record that Buddha descended from Heaven, was immaculately conceived and born of Maia, wrought miracles, then ascended from Adam's Peak in Ceylon where Buddhists still adore his last foot-print on earth. Two hundred millions believe the story about

* It is possible (even though Chrysostom denies it), that Paul was preferred not only because it was Hellenistic, but because Saul seemed related to *σαλεύειν*, to persecute, and Paul recalled *παύσασθαι* to protect.

Jesus ; three hundred millions believe the same about Buddha. And yet with the same miraculous authentication one of these prophets is held to have revealed that after death each soul passes before a heavenly Judge, and thence to endless joy or torment ; while the other prophet, with the same credentials, taught that at death each soul sinks to everlasting repose, if not annihilation. What will those oriental people think when they find from those millions of Bibles sent out to them that the same signs and wonders which are attesting one thing about the future in Asia are attesting a different thing in Europe ? And what will our Christians think when they presently have the Eastern Bibles and make the same discovery ? Why the light of the new day will dawn for both East and West. They will see in the legends and fables the broidery of the mantle which falls from prophet to prophet. Its decoration is the hereditary folklore of the ignorant, but it is sacred to them, and their superstitions follow only where their hearts have gone. It is the deep homage of the poor that they believe of Buddha all the legends told of Vishnu, or bring their sweetest fables about Apollo or Minerva to twine them around the brow of Christ and Mary. The legends and miracles concerning the great personal religions, being nearly the same, cannot on the morrow attest their several and contrarious visions ; but all the more will those signs attest that each was in his time and place the highest, truest man ; a true saviour of the people about whose neck they clung ; who touched the depth of their heart and revealed its treasures ; at whose grave women planted mystical flowers as they wept for them-

selves and their children ; and all transmitted a blessed memory that gradually called around it the old fables which had hallowed every prophet till he passed into abstract deification, then fallen on the shoulders of the next worthy to wear their emblem. Miracle is not God's sign, but sign of the homage of the poor. And when this is realised, as the morning shall reveal it, then shall each great Soul rise from his sectarian tomb, and take his place in the fraternity of Saviours, and each shall bring in his arms all his sheaves from the seed he has sown in human hearts, for the common garner of Humanity.

V.

But, ah, you say, what will the morrow reveal to us about God, and about immortality? What a confession of the emptiness of all sectarian religions that at the end of so many ages they have left the educated world without certainty on the very points—God and Immortality—upon which they have concentrated their power ! So many millions sacrificed, so much wealth diverted from man to God and from the present to the future, only to leave us in scepticism at last !

Of one thing be sure,—the Morrow will reverse all that. It is plain that no more light is to be got from the sectarian day that has set, or from its Afterglow that now fades. Christian enthusiasm is spent. The strongest manifestations of its life in our time have been Mormonism, Shakerism, Moodyism, and Spirit-rapping. Sectarianism has run to seed in Christendom, and just as much in the

religions of Asia. All our hope of new light now comes of the liberation of the human mind in every part of the world from these other-worldly methods which have so conspicuously failed ; and the concentration of the combined energies of all the mind, heart and wealth of the earth to the work of civilising religion and raising it to equality with our material and scientific progress. We have found that gazing into the sky does not reveal God, now let us try what will come of exploring the earth, and man, and history. The Chinese sage said to men, "Since you do not yet know man how can you know God? Since you do not comprehend life how can you comprehend death?" Some of us believe—I believe—that eyes turned from phantom gods have caught glimpses of a divine life in the evolution of nature, and the mystical movement of the heart of man. Already some have listened deep, and heard a sweet music to which the ages keep time, and man ever marches to a happy destiny. The universe is the shrine of Reason ; it is the abode of Love ; it is the temple of Conscience. These we have derived from it, and from us they shall return to it in that perfect trust which no surrounding darkness can extinguish, not even the darkness of the grave. But it is with these our larger hope is ascending. We know that Reason has hardly begun to tell its story, that Love has been drooping in the dungeon of fear, and Conscience hardly awakened from the drugs of superstition. They have yet to fulfil their career in religion which has so long denied them. They can find their freedom and fulness only in the unity of mankind. Of old the races

streamed out through the earth, like pulses from the heart of Nature, that every member of the body might be fed from a common life; and though member has warred with member, still has their secret life centred in that one heart. Now let the day of harmony dawn! Now let member co-operate with member, and nation say to nation, "I have need of thee!"

What! some may say, have these half-civilised people in the East, who have no railways or telegraphs, any contribution to religion which we have need of? Ask Philology what it has got from their languages,—from Zend, Pāli, Sanskrit, spoken there when their people were much more barbarous. Science will enter a new kingdom by doorway of a beetle. The very thing we all have need to get rid of is this same conceit about our own religious condition. There was a day when even learned men believed this little earth was the centre of things: when the earth lost that conceit of its own importance man gained a universe. And when we feel that Christianity is but one race's sect among others, some of which are more important, we shall enter into a spiritual Cosmos, under which all sects will sink and all souls arise. All this points to the future. Christianity, Mohammedanism, all sects, are powerless to rule or name the coming day because they have no supreme faith in it; their largest hope for all coming days is that they may duplicate the days that are gone, or carry them backward in closer retrogressive resemblance to the Year One of Crescent or Cross. Their most refined statements bring the past to dim our hope of prophets nobler

than theirs, to be born of the enthusiasm of Humanity. To cast away their authority is the first essential step towards turning our face to the sunrise. While Science, Art, Civilisation are bending all their eyes forward, this anomaly that religion should ever look backward cannot last. The highest religion of to-day is to look and labour for a nobler day.

Nor can I think that new day so distant. For this matter the world of men means mainly all those who think. The thinkers of the world are but thinly divided by veils of language and tricks of expression; speedily will they pierce these and discover that round the world hearts beat with one moral blood, and eyes see by one and the same sunlight. And as thought moves so will the most motionless masses gravitate; and every sect in the world be subtly consumed, through and through by that popular disgust of bigotry and hypocrisy which will emanate from the fairly awakened conscience and intellect of mankind.

THE END.









